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Creating New Spaces: Investigating Opportunities for Identity Exploration in a High School English Classroom

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Creating New Spaces: Investigating Opportunities for Identity Exploration in a High School English Classroom

by

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Dedication

For Miah, my patience

For Mom, my constant support

For Kimberly, my laughter

For Dad, my teacher

For Patrick, my voice of reason

For Angela, my inspiration

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Creating New Spaces: Investigating Opportunities for Identity Exploration in a High School English Classroom

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how identity exploration occurred in a high school English classroom. This semester-long study employed ethnographic methods of data collection, including student and teacher interviews, classroom observations, and video and audio recordings of classroom events. Data was analyzed using the constant comparative method and discourse analysis (Davies and Harré, 1990; Gee, 2005; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Sociocultural theories of language and literacy and theories of identity and agency were used to inform analysis about the relationship between identity and literacy in this high school English classroom with a White teacher and African American and Latino/a students (Bakhtin, 1981; Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, and Cain, 1998; Wells, 1999).

Findings suggest that the following four categories of instructional practices and talk were used to facilitate identity exploration by the teacher: (a) connection of classroom literacy practices to the everyday lives and literacies of students, (b) encouragement of multiple perspectives and viewpoints, (c) engagement in the

investigation of sociopolitical issues, and (d) development of student agency. These practices and ways of talking attempted to create a figured world that valued students' backgrounds and discourses. The case studies of three students provided insight into how they appropriated, resisted, and/or transformed identities and literacy practices during identity work. The students' stories indicated that identity exploration provided a space for them to reshape old identities and imagine new identities, to transform the classroom structure in order to be successful, and to examine tensions in order to make changes within their local contexts. This study offers insight into the possibilities of identity exploration in literacy classrooms and argues that identity work may be one way for teachers to transform opportunities in the classroom for students with diverse backgrounds.

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Chapter One

Introduction

> Like a group of musicians improvising together, speech events, including classroom discourse, can only be accomplished by the collaborative work of two or more persons. In this sense, school is always a performance that must be constituted through the participation of a group of actors. Teacher and students may have different visions of how the performance should be performed, so the teacher assumes the dual role of stage director and chief actor. She may even consider herself the only "native speaker" in the classroom culture, yet she has to depend on "immigrant" students for help in enacting a culturally defined activity.
>
> (Cazden, 2001, p. 40)

> Perhaps I have been wrong all these years, and culture is not so much a wave as it is a river. Yes, we are all moving along in the water. And, yes, there are currents that move generally in one direction and often make it easiest to go with the flow. Although the currents are not always predictable, the surroundings often change, and the river can change course, it is still possible to travel the river under control and chart your own course. What we need to teach students is how to recognize the challenges of the river; how to navigate it to get to where they want to go; and, when necessary, how to turn the boat around and--slowly and with great effort--move upstream against the current.
>
> (Williams, 2006/2007, p.306)

This dissertation tells a story about a complicated and dynamic classroom space in which the teacher attempted to empower her students by showing them how to "navigate" their worlds and "get to where they want to go; and, when necessary, how to turn the boat around and--slowly and with great effort--move upstream against the current" (Williams, 2006/2007, p. 306). As the "stage director" of the classroom, the teacher negotiated the various "visions" and "performances" of her students in order to build a space that fit the needs and interests of her students (Cazden, 2001, p. 40). Although this space is difficult to create because of the social nature of classroom, the teacher viewed students' identities

more fluidly, allowing room for her and her students to imagine themselves in new ways and shape their identities and worlds around them.

THE STUDY

Rushmore High School is situated in a neighborhood near a major highway and is filled with African American and Latino/a students. The highway is a well-known dividing line between the east and west sides of the city. Discrepancies in education within the district are based on this supposed divider. Rushmore is a school that struggles with high-stakes testing, has a high dropout rate for students, and has a high turnover rate for teachers and administrators. Researchers have found that most urban schools struggle with the same issues, and studies have been dedicated to finding out why these issues exist (Anyon, 1997; Fine, 1991; Heath, 1993). Although researchers have found various explanations, many agree that the social, political, and economic gap between students and teachers plays an important role in the mismatch between the ways in which teachers teach and learners learn (Anyon, 1997; Heath, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 2001; 2006)

Although I was aware of these challenges at Rushmore, I also knew that most of the English department, made up of a majority of White teachers, worked hard to develop strategies that lessened this gap so that social, cultural, and economic issues did not consistently inhibit learning. They did this by learning about the students' cultures and by creating a curriculum that bridged the gap between home and academic discourses. For example, some members of the department attempted to make reading and writing more relevant through a multigenre research project in which students researched topics

that pertained to their daily lives and/or personal interests, such as teenage pregnancy, homosexuality, and the war in Iraq.

I chose to collaborate with Gina, a young White female, and her Latino/a and African American students, in an on-level classroom because Gina worked to create a classroom space that valued and empowered her students. Although Gina's background was different from her students, she used several strategies to learn more about her students' motivations, interests, and capabilities. For example, when I first visited Gina's room, the class was writing *This I Believe* essays, similar to the essays read aloud on National Public Radio pertaining to the writer's personal beliefs. Students wrote about topics that dealt with issues such as immigration, drug addiction, and relationships. In these essays, students had the opportunity to weave their personal stories and experiences into an essay about their beliefs. For some students, this writing assignment became a place for them to re-voice borrowed words from peers, teachers, and parents, then mold and transform those words with their own strength and intentions (Bakhtin, 1981; Dyson, 1999). In other words, students acted as "textual borrowers," who used language in various ways to make sense out of themselves and the world around them (Dyson, 1999; p. 369). Thus, this essay serves as an example of the kind of the identity exploration that students had the opportunity to engage in during Gina's classroom.

It is unusual for classrooms to invite students to engage in this kind of identity work through literacy events (Cazden, 2001; Mercer, 2000; Marshall, Smagorinsky & Smith, 1995; Wells, 1999). Teachers who promote and encourage identity work must be willing to take risks and deal with issues that have the potential to cause conflict in the

classroom because of their personal and political nature. Instead of staying away from conflicts for fear of spurring arguments, Gina used these differing beliefs and opinions as a way to promote thinking in the classroom. She recognized that the culture of a classroom was similar to a group of musicians improvising together, as Courtney Cazden (2001) described in the opening quote. In other words, she was aware that she must learn from and about the students in order to accomplish the collaborative work involved in teaching and learning. Gina and her students constructed a space in the classroom, which allowed students to express themselves and their experiences within literacy events, as done through the *This I Believe* papers. This new space motivated me to develop this study, which examines how a White teacher and Latino/a and African American students make sense of themselves and the world around them through various types of literacy practices. More specifically, it pushed me to begin an investigation of the types of instructional practices and talk that Gina used to facilitate a classroom space in which identity exploration occurred. To better understand identity work in the classroom, I also examined how students' identities shaped and were shaped by the literacy practices within those moments.

RELEVANCE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Urban Schools

Urban schools are becoming increasingly diverse and will continue to do so in the future. Notions of diversity have become more complex by broadening the definition to include students who are multiracial, multiethnic, and vary linguistically, religiously, and economically (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Morrell, 2004). In addition, students come to

school with their own stories and are dealing with a whole range of social issues that face contemporary youth (Ladson-Billings, 2001). This extensive diversity can both inhibit and foster learning in a classroom (Morrell, 2004). The social, cultural, and economic differences between students and teachers can play a role in the inhibition of learning by students in diverse schools (Ladson-Billings, 2001; 2006). Despite this research, the diversity of teachers is decreasing (Morrell, 2003). In today's classrooms, an estimated amount of 88% of teachers are White and 81% are 45 years and older (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Diverse urban schools are also grappling with the ways in which curriculum should teach students how to negotiate the many literacy practices, such as media, in their academic, professional, and everyday lives (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Morrell, 2004). In addition, the literacy practices which students learn in school and at home are likely to shift and transform several times throughout their lifetime. For example, the ways in which people communicate about professional and personal issues are likely to change with the increase in email and text messaging. These changing definitions of literacy shift what students read and write and how they engage in literacy practices in the classroom. For these reasons, an increasing need exists to research the literacy practices of students in schools with diverse students and a majority of White teachers.

The Figured World of a Classroom

Ethnically diverse classrooms are especially complex because students come to school with a variety of discourses and ways of learning that may not match up with the discourses and learning norms of the school and teacher. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner,

and Cain (1998) described the complex dynamics of social, cultural, and political realms in their concept of figured worlds. The term "world" is described as an "as if" realm that is peopled by characters from collective imaginings, such as academia, crime, or romance. Holland et al. (1998) used Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) as an example of a world in which participants tell stories, collect tokens for sobriety, and name themselves as alcoholics. All of these elements are "meaningful in, relevant to, and valued (or not) in relation to a frame of meaning, a virtual world, a world that has been figured" (p. 51). In other words, these sociohistoric worlds have characters, activities, languages, and outcomes that are valued over others. These figured worlds are often marked by gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and other qualities of difference. At the same time, within these "as if" worlds, identities can be re-shaped or re-positioned based on everyday experiences. When viewed as a figured world, a classroom is a space in which identities are developed based on practices and activities situated in social, cultural, and historical worlds and is a space in which students position themselves or are positioned in ways that are either inclusive or exclusive. When teachers understand that a classroom is influenced by social and cultural factors, educators are more likely to reshape the space so that students with various backgrounds are able to become part of the classroom conversation (Gutierrez, 1995). In Gina's classroom, I had the opportunity to see how Gina shaped a figured world that considered and valued the needs of her students. I also observed how students enacted their identities through literacy events in order to shape a space that fit their needs, more or less successfully.

Classrooms such as Gina's have not been typical for urban youth. Several studies have found that diverse urban schools can be spaces that limit learning opportunities for students who are considered to be non-mainstream (Anyon, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). Instruction is typically based on unchallenging, low-level material in which students practice rote learning (Anyon, 1997). The use of unchallenging curriculum in the classroom is tied to the term deficit learning, which refers to the belief that students fail because of an internal deficiency (Valenzuela, 1999). These deficiencies have also been recognized as ways of learning that deviate from the norm. Therefore, students who are not part of the mainstream have been labeled at-risk or culturally deprived. Even though most urban schools are diverse, theories and practices continue to be based on studies of European and European-American children and adolescents (Lee et al., 2003). Research has suggested that curriculum should be based on the cultures and backgrounds of the students so that all students find value and relevance in school (Anyon, 1997).

When students enter the figured world of a classroom, they come to know the signs or languages of that world. They get a feel for "the game" and develop an understanding of what they can say, how they can feel, how they should behave, and so forth. Talk is one way that students play the game, and they can become members of various social words through talk. Words help students come to know themselves, values, rights, and obligations which is necessary to know in particular social lives or settings in order to be accepted (Edwards & Westgate, 1994). The classroom has a set of Discourses and rituals that are promoted by the teacher but performed in various ways by its multiple members (Lewis, 1997). Discourses can be complicated because they include

not only classroom interactions, but also the ideologies that define life in a classroom (Lewis, 1997). Researchers have found that the discourse used in most classrooms does not always match up with the discourse of its students (Au, 1980; Heath, 1983). This mismatch is believed to be one of the causes of low achievement in diverse schools (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Hymes, 2003).

Research has also established that classroom interactions are complicated because of issues of power and status (Alvermann, 1996; Ellsworth, 1989; Finders, 1997; Lewis, 1997; Marshall et al., 1995). For example, Ellsworth (1989) found that in her diverse college classroom, students did not feel comfortable sharing their perspectives if they were not a part of the mainstream. She also found that her status as a teacher made it difficult for students to disagree with her perspective. In addition, gender differences have been found to include or exclude students from classroom conversations (Alvermann, 1996; Finders, 1997). For example, Sadker and Sadker (1986) found that teachers in their study were more likely to call on male students during whole-class discussions. Although this research recognized that power and status complicate classroom interactions, more research needs to done on the ways in which teachers and students deal with these issues. Mercer (2000) suggested clarifying the ground rules so that students are aware of the discourse norms that are used in various types of classroom conversations. Although such insight is helpful, it is also important to ask who makes these ground rules and why they were made. Investigating the origins of these grounds rules may be more likely to reveal power dynamics in classroom discussions (Gee, 1996). More research needs to be done in classrooms to illustrate the ways in which students and

teachers deal with issues of power and status so that opportunities are provided for diverse students to become part of the classroom discussion.

White Teachers in Diverse Classrooms

Teaching in an urban school with diverse students can be especially challenging to teachers who do not share similar social, historical, and cultural experiences as the students attending classes (Ladson-Billings, 2001; McIntyre, 1997; Nieto, 2002; Sleeter, 1995). Although some White teachers often believe that taking a color-blind (gender-blind, class-blind) approach is helping students, this approach can lead to the ignoring of issues of race in the classroom that need to be identified and examined. Although filled with good intentions, teachers who approach students in this way may devalue the background and community of the students, which in turn disables the students (Au & Raphael, 2000; Paley, 1979; Sleeter, 1995).

In research with White teachers, educators found that White teachers use a variety of strategies to create a composite classroom culture (Cazden, 2001; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001; McIntyre, 1997). Some strategies denied the culture of the student, which hindered participation and possibly learning. More successful strategies provided opportunities for students to become involved in the interactions that worked towards the development of a classroom culture. These opportunities allowed students to affirm their cultural identities and strive for high levels of literacy and academic achievement. These strategies suggested that although the social, historical, and cultural differences between White teachers and diverse students can inhibit learning, teaching strategies exist that reduce the gap by bridging home and school discourses in the classroom and integrating

multicultural curriculum into various subjects. More research needs to be done that focuses on the strategies of White teachers in diverse classrooms.

A New Classroom Space

To deal with these issues, some teachers have attempted to create new spaces in their classroom so that diverse learners have the opportunity to engage in various literacy events. Au (1993) worked to build an understanding of the mismatches between mainstream and non-mainstream discourses in the classroom and suggested ways in which teachers and students can bridge these differences through literacy events that benefit the multiple backgrounds and perspectives of students. Au (1993) suggested the integration of students' cultural resources, including discourses, into the curriculum of the classroom. She believed that with more awareness from educators that children come from different cultural backgrounds and speech economies, it is possible to create a space in which all students can be successful.

In addition, Guitierrez (1999) used the term "third space" to describe a classroom in which students have the opportunity to use hybrid discourses to learn and find meaning in texts. This new space provides a way to bridge the academic and home discourses so that students can learn about academic discourse while validating the discourse of their culture. A classroom may also become a navigational space in which students can cross and succeed in difference discourse communities (Moje et al., 2004). In addition, a third space may challenge dominant knowledges and Discourses and move toward developing new knowledges and Discourses. The idea of third space is significant for the study of urban classrooms because it provides insight into how teachers and students can create

opportunities for students to become part of literacy events in classrooms. More research needs to be done to analyze the ways in which teachers and students create a space that provides opportunities for students to explore their identities and potentially shapes the classroom space for their needs and interests.

SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM

To address the need for more research about diverse students' opportunities to negotiate identities within classroom spaces, I studied identity work and negotiation in a classroom with a White teacher and Latino/a and African American students. The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways in which Gina created a space in the classroom that fostered identity exploration with her high school students. In addition, this study provided a way to think about how students shape and are shaped by their literacy practices within spaces that provide those opportunities. To explore these issues, I addressed the following questions:

- How does identity exploration occur within a high school English classroom with a White teacher and Latino/a and African American students?
- How does Gina facilitate opportunities for identity exploration in her literacy classroom?
- What is the relationship between students' identities and their literacy practices within opportunities of identity exploration?

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

As mentioned above, the goal of this research is to explore the ways in which identity work occurred in a high school English classroom with a White teacher and

Latino/a and African American students. Before I present findings regarding that identity work, I first review relevant theory and literature in chapter two in order to provide a framework for this study. In this chapter, I build on theories that view literacy as a social practice, acknowledge the relationship between identity and literacy in classrooms, realize the importance of valuing the social, cultural, and historical worlds of students, and explore identity work within high school literacy classrooms.

In chapter three, I present decisions about the methodological design, including a description of ethnographic methods and the use of discourse analysis. Next, I discuss the site, participants, and field entry of the study. After developing the context of the study, I provide a detailed description of the data collection and data analysis techniques. To close, I address trustworthiness criteria, ethical issues, strengths, and limitations of the study.

The fourth chapter addresses the first sub-question of the study: How did Gina facilitate opportunities for identity exploration in her classroom? The purpose of this chapter is to provide a thick description of the ways in which Gina (along with her students) created a figured world in which students had opportunities to engage in identity work. I begin with a description of the "tensions" that students bring with them to the classroom and consequently deal with through literacy practices in Gina's classroom. Second, I discuss the following instructional practices and talk that Gina used to facilitate opportunities for identity exploration: (a) connection of classroom literacy practices to the everyday lives and literacies of students; (b) encouragement of multiple perspectives

and viewpoints; (c) engagement in the investigation of sociopolitical issues; and (d) development of student agency.

In chapter five, I investigate how three student's (June, Freddy, and Lucy) identities shaped and were shaped by literacy practices within moments of identity exploration. Each of the students tells a different story about the opportunities that literacy exploration provided for them in this classroom. Within each case study, I discuss how the three students constructed, resisted, and reshaped their identities through identity work.

The final chapter summarizes the findings of the study. I examine the creation of this figured world and the constructions of identities within identity work through Holland et al.'s (1998) theory of a "space of authoring." I argue that opportunities for identity exploration became a space for students to author themselves and the world around them. To finish, I consider implications for practice and future research.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Perspectives and Related Literature

In this chapter, I review theories and research that build a frame for this study. First, the concept of figured worlds is used to examine the interactions and meanings of students and a teacher in this high school English classroom. Second, I build on theorists who argue for a sociocultural perspective of language and literacy. Third, I draw on literature that examines the relationship between identity and literacy. Within this section, I describe: past research about "markers of difference" in the figured world of classrooms; the development and enactments of identities in figured worlds; the construction of identity through literacy practices; and language, identity, and the creation of figured worlds. Fourth, I review literature about White teachers in diverse classrooms. Finally, I discuss research about new classroom spaces that value and cultivate the cultural resources of diverse students.

FIGURED WORLDS

Holland et al. (1998) defined a figured world as a "socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (p. 53). In other words, figured worlds are communities in which there is "some predictable order to human behavior" (Pennington, 2004, p. 4). A figured world takes shape "within and grant[s] shape to the coproduction of activities, discourses, performances, and artifacts" and is "peopled by the figures, characters, and types who

carry out its tasks and who also have styles of interacting within, distinguishable perspectives on, and orientations toward it" (p. 51). For example, Alcoholics Anonymous can be considered to be a figured world because particular elements, such as tokens for sobriety, regular meetings in which they tell stories, and identifying themselves as alcoholics, are meaningful and valued within that particular world. Thus, a literacy classroom is a figured world in which particular elements, such as reading and writing, sitting in desks, identifying as a teacher and/or students make up that world.

I am interested in the classroom as a figured world for two reasons. One, to better understand how both the teacher and students shaped a figured world to fit their needs and interests. Two, to gain insight into how students take form or form their identities within the figured world of the classroom, especially one in which the teacher's goals are agency and empowerment. The figured world of a classroom is especially complicated because students within that figured world are constantly reshaping its particular behaviors and activities. I use this notion of figured worlds to gain an understanding of the complicated interactions and meanings of students and teachers within a classroom. Throughout this literature review, I explain the various elements of a figured world and the ways in which it provides insight into Gina's classroom.

A SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

A sociocultural perspective provides insight into how language and literacy are interconnected and are socially, historically, and culturally constructed. Traditional theories of learning typically view the process of knowledge as a transmission procedure from teacher to student in which the students practice and memorize information (Wells,

2001; Wertsch, 1991). Alternative theories of development concentrated on the diverse backgrounds of students and found that learners actively construct knowledge based on what they already know (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Wells, 1999; 2001). Holland et al. (1998) used the theories of Vygotsky, Bakhtin, and others to explain the belief that intellect originates from culture or society and that cognitive development relies on social and interpersonal interactions.

Vygotsky was a major influence in the articulation of the sociocultural perspective on learning. In disagreement with Piaget, he argued that learners actively construct knowledge through social interactions rather than as individuals (Mercer, 1995, 2000; Wells, 1999). For example, children usually seek and receive guidance from adults when they are learning about new information; this guidance, typically in the form of language, helps learners construct meaning, solve problems, organize information, and pursue interests (Mercer, 2000; 1995). Vygotsky viewed language as a tool that introduced learners into a variety of cultures (Wells, 1999; Wertsch, 1991). He believed that learners learned various ways with words, which enabled them to become members of particular communities or cultures (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Wells, 2001). In this sense, Vygotsky argued that language not only influenced intellect, but also the formation of the person (Wells, 2001).

Bakhtin (1981) also contributed to theories about language and learning by discussing the ways in which language determines and is determined by culture. In *The Dialogic Imagination,* he discussed his view of socio-ideological language and described heteroglossia, a concept that illustrates how people use various languages throughout the

day based on the multiple communities and cultures in which people interact (Mercer, 1995; 2000; Wells, 1999). Bakhtin emphasized that the time and place of talk is important to consider and suggested that the speaker and the audience are influenced by social, political, and cultural factors (Wells, 1999; Wertsch, 1991). He delved deeper into notions of language and learning by describing people as textual borrowers in which they take words from others and use them in an ongoing dialogue (Dyson, 1999; Wells, 1999). Bakhtin stated that words exist "in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own" (p. 293-94). To make the word one's own, people enter into "a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents" (p. 276). This tension is negotiated by selectively choosing the words of others and then creating an internally persuasive discourse in which words are half their own or half another's. In literacy classrooms, students often struggle through that tension in writing or discussion in which they resist repeating the words of authorities (i.e. "authoritative discourse") and orchestrate words into their own.

Students also enter classrooms with ways of language that mark them as members of particular social or cultural groups (Gee, 1996). Schools can foster these ways of talking and can also broaden students' languages by giving students the opportunity to engage in talk that they are not exposed to outside of school, such as academic talk (Gee, 1996; Mercer, 2000). However, as literacy sociocultural theorists warn, language and learning are wrapped up in issues of power and the ways in which students learn through language are dependent on the tools that the surrounding community provides (Gee, 1996; Mercer, 2000).

This perspective acknowledges that language and literacy are embedded in social events. Many socioculturalists believe that schools should incorporate various ways of learning literacy in the classroom so that diverse students have the opportunity to build fluency in multiple literacies (Street, 1993). This research contributes to the sociocultural perspective by focusing on the ways in which the social, historical, and cultural world of the classroom shapes literacy practices in this particular classroom. Because part of the figured world of the classroom is dependent on Gina's objectives for her literacy students, the study will highlight the role that the teacher plays in shaping a space that values and empowers her students. Students also form and reform the figured world, which is why this research examined how students' identities shaped and were shaped by literacy practices in the classroom.

IDENTITY AND LITERACY

Identities, or "self-understandings" are the ways in which people "tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are" (p. 3). They are a "key means through which people care about and care for what is going on around them" and are a base "from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being" (p. 5). Identities play an important role in the figured world of a classroom because they shape and are shaped by students' literacy practices. According to Holland et al. (1998) figured worlds are places in which people "fashion senses of self" or develop identities, "dialectically and dialogically" (p. 60). Identities are complicated because they are multiple and unstable but are important because they are the perspectives that persons "bring to understanding new activities and new figured worlds" (p. 60). It is important to

respect the backgrounds and perspectives that students bring with them and to pay attention to students' voices and their silences in the classroom. If students are not able to discuss new concepts in the classroom because of the ways in which they are positioned or positioned by others based on race, class, gender, or sexuality, opportunities for learning are less likely to occur. Positionality is one way in which people practice their identities within a figured world and is defined as "the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines (Davies and Harré, 1990, p. 91). In Gina's classroom, I paid attention to the ways in which Gina positioned her students so that they became part of the figured world of the classroom. I also focused on the ways in which students positioned themselves and others in the classroom and how those positionings shaped their literacy practices. Below, I describe how social, cultural, and historical worlds shape how students position themselves and others, thus shaping their literacy practices in the classroom.

Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality in the Figured World of Classrooms

As Holland et al. (1998) mentioned, people's figured worlds are frequently influenced by factors such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. More specifically, these factors shape how students, within the figured world of the classroom, make sense of themselves and the world around them. This in turn also affects how students use language in particular discourse communities (Au & Raphael, 2003; Gonzales, 2004). Although much research has focused on the effects of a single factor, such as gender, theories of identity also recognize that it is necessary to study the intersection of these

factors, such as the ways in which gender intersects with class, race, and sexuality (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Many researchers, who focus on how culture influences language and learning, believe that it is important not to view culture as static (Gonzales, 2004; Lee et al., 2003; Ogbu, 1987). Like all identities, cultural identities are constantly being negotiated based on the experiences people have with places, people, and artifacts (Lee et al., 2003). Many scholars in education have found that school influences the ways in which students negotiate their cultural identities (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lee et al., 2003). Many minority students found school to be irrelevant or hostile to the development of their identities, and in return became a place that rejected and labeled them based on race and class (Cohen, 1993). Fordham and Ogbu (2005) found that many African American students refused to learn or succeed in school because they associated academic success with "acting White." In other words, minority students often felt forced to choose between a strong ethnic identity over an academic identity, making them feel "raceless" in school (Nasir & Saxe, 2003). By refusing to play the game of school, they were able to keep their African American identities. Trueba (2002) found the same to be true in his work in the Mexican-American barrio with Mexican-Americans who posed as illiterates to keep their identity as *Cholo*. In *Subtractive Schooling*, Valenzuela (1999) found that schooling could be a subtractive process for non-college bound Latino/a students. She argued that the high school in her study "divests these youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure" (p. 3).

Thus, markers of difference, such as race and class, shape how students enact identities within schools and classrooms.

Research has also recognized that students' ways of talking can conflict with the discourses used in a classroom (Au & Raphael, 2000; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983). Hymes (2003) called these mismatches sociolinguistic interference, which led to barriers for some non-mainstream students. For some students the skills needed for school are newly acquired and what the student has learned at home needs to be set aside in order to learn how to be a student. In other words, they need to master a code, which is rarely ever explicated (Delpit, 2002; Edwards & Westgate, 1994). For example, Corson (2001) found that the discourse norms for aboriginals in Australia were very different than the norms practiced in public schools in which they were attending. These differences made it difficult for the students to succeed in the classroom. In addition, Walkerdine (1997) found that gender differences influenced that ways in which students understood classroom talk. In her study, students continued to reproduce narrow standards of gender by using a mainstream discourse that privileged men over women. She suggested that students would benefit from using alternative discourses to express their gender identity. Fordham (1999) found that African American students typically engaged in Ebonics or African American Vernacular English in school. At Capital High, African American students who failed to reject the academic language of the school were accused of "acting White" (p. 6). Finally, Blackburn (2005) found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth often "sanitize" their experiences by using a more mainstream discourse to protect themselves from further marginalization.

These mismatches have also led to the labeling of students as at-risk or learning disabled. Flores, Tefft, and Diaz (1991) and Valencia and Black (2002) illustrated that non-mainstream students are labeled at-risk because they are from non-mainstream backgrounds. They found that because students' learning and language strategies were different from the strategies used by teachers, students were believed to be incapable of learning. Researchers stated that educators needed to broaden their assumptions about language and literacy by instructing students in ways and in discourses that connect with their ways of being (Florio-Ruane et al., 1992; Valencia and Black, 2002).

Studying race in relation to other factors such as gender, class, and sexuality is important because it offers a more complete explanation of how students' identities shape and are shaped by their literacy practices. For example, Bettie (2003) explored how class influences the formation of racial/ethnic, gender, and sexuality identities, making the point that females are never without class which is constantly influencing the ways in which they negotiate their identities and possible selves. McCarthey and Moje (2002) pointed out that these "qualities of difference" follow students from space to space, which reminds educators that race, class, gender, and sexuality are constant factors that influence who students are and the way they view the world.

This literature demonstrates that factors such as class, race, gender, and sexuality shape the figured world of the classroom, the identities of students, and the ways in which students engage in literacy practices. In Gina's classroom, I pay attention to how these identities shape and are shaped by literacy practices within the figured world of the classroom. In addition, I note how Gina and the students deal with issues of race, class,

gender, and sexuality within classroom literacy events. As Holland et al. (1998) explained, identities become the outcome of taking part in activities in a figured world, such as a classroom. Students and teachers can become part of a "community of practice" in which they consistently capitalize on the diversity in the classroom. This may not be possible if educators do not acknowledge and address the tensions that are likely to occur from diverse backgrounds in one classroom.

The Development and Enactment of Identities in Figured Worlds

Within a figured world, students enact their identities in various ways for diverse reasons. These enactments can influence how students position themselves and others in order to become part of the classroom. Positioning theorists believe that people position themselves and others along storylines or narratives in which they feel comfortable (Davies & Harré, 1990; Holland et al, 1998). Within this theory people are viewed as agent, author, actor, and audience recruited into frameworks of meaning in which they reconstruct to become participants (Davies & Harré, 1990; Fairbanks & Arial, 2006). According to Holland et al. (1998), positional identity is a "person's apprehension of her social position in a lived world" (p. 127). These positions are day-to-day relations of power and entitlement, and they depend on the people and context surrounding that person. Students entering a figured world of a classroom will come to know signs and claims of status or will acquire a feel for the game. Bourdieu (cited in Holland et al., 1998), like Bakhtin, revealed that a speaker is aware of the "differential social valuing of languages" and described the "habitual assessments" that people make when talking (p.

137). Students in a classroom may assess that classroom literacy practices are marked and choose to exclude themselves from engaging in those practices as a form of protest.

For example, Lewis (1997) studied the issues of power and status in small group work in a classroom. She found that age, ability, gender, and class influenced how the group talked about literacy. Many of the females said that they felt empowered in the classroom because the teacher often put female students in leadership positions. These positionings by the teacher, students, and other students depended on how their gender (female) intersected with ability, age, and sometimes class. In addition, their power and status in and outside of the classroom influenced how they acted and interacted in the classroom. Teachers can become more aware of these intersections by providing a space for students to talk about their identity work in relation to literature. When teachers learn more about students, they make fewer assumptions about their capabilities and create spaces in which students are comfortable becoming part of the classroom (McCarthey and Moje, 2002).

Identity enactment has also been described as a performance in which identities, such as gender, change depending on the place, time, and surrounding people (Butler, 1990; Holland et al., 1998). In other words, identities are an act or a "doing" rather than a "being" (Butler, 1990). Sometimes people may seem as if they have a fixed core of identity, but performance theorists explain that this is actually a fictive core, which is caused by repetitive acts of doing or performing (Butler, 1990). Anzaldúa (1999), in her description of cluster-of-stories, explained that the formation of identity is like a narrative in which people perform identities within a story in order to belong. She also recognized

that in order to grasp the multiple identities of a person, one needs to understand the person's viewpoint and the viewpoint of others surrounding them.

Several literacy researchers have studied the complicated relationship between identity and literacy in classrooms (Bettie, 2003; Enciso, 1998; Gallas, 1998). Gallas (1998) found that in her elementary classroom students performed particular identities, such as gender, to gain power in the classroom. She concluded that these performances influenced their desire to be part of the classroom community, which in turn shaped the success of their schoolwork. Enciso (1998) explored the ways in which pre-adolescent girls positioned themselves in texts. She found that a group of girls jointly constructed their identities as females and at various times accepted or resisted the mainstream concept of feminine. In addition, Bettie (2003) pointed out that the performativity of the girls in her ethnography portrayed how they enacted class scripts in connection to their gender, race, and sexuality. The cultural capital they held produced the performances of the girls in school, which led Bettie to assume that these working girls would have working class futures.

Although students are shaped by "markers of difference," such as gender and class, they are also able to reshape their identities and the worlds around them. Holland et al. (1998) also mentioned that when people come to develop a "sense" of their worlds, they may rethink their positions in those worlds (Holland et al., 1998). In a classroom, students become aware of their positions and can re-create dispositions. In other words, identities can be accepted and resisted by people. For example, Bucholtz (1999) found that self-claimed "geeks" resisted identities related to "coolness" by dressing differently

and speaking in more sophisticated language, such as choosing not to use the word "dude." This notion of improvisation and transformation is important because it illustrates how language and literacy can shift and transform the identities of students and teacher. These shifts can lead to the development of a new world or space that speaks to the needs of diverse students (Holland et al., 1998).

Positional and performance identity are important to this study because they provide insight into the various perspectives that students bring to the figured world of the classroom. The ways in which students position themselves and perform multiple identities in a classroom shapes students' literacy practices. For example, students might resist particular literacy practices to keep a powerful position in their social group. When a teacher understands this, she can use a variety of strategies that open spaces for students to position themselves in different ways in the classroom. To better understand how Gina worked to shape open spaces for students, I explored how she positioned herself and her students through instructional practices and instructional talk. I also attended to the ways in which students performed identities and positioned themselves during various literacy events, specifically events that included identity exploration.

Construction of Identities through Literacy

Because figured worlds are made up of the "history-in-person" that comes to understand new activities, opportunities for identity construction is an important part of shaping the classroom space (Holland et al., 1998). One's history-in-person can be defined as "the sediment from past experiences upon which one improvises, using the cultural resources available, in response to the subject positions afforded one in the

present" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 18). When teachers connect literacy practices with the development of adolescents' identities by making connections to their past experiences, to who they are, and to who they might become in the future, students are more likely to become invested in what they are learning (Alvermann et al, 1999). For example, Dyson (1999) stated that students must "act as social negotiators" when working through new texts. She suggested that students use their cultural models and multiple identities to make sense of literature while at the same time create meaning about themselves and others (Dyson, 1999, p. 380). Rogers (1997) described the identity work of a student in a contemporary urban classroom with students from diverse backgrounds. The student's writing assignment about his worst memory described a time when he was shot at a party. As he talked through his text to the class and teacher, he explicitly discussed the reconstruction of his identity after this incident by saying, "I don't want to be a bum. I don't want to live off other people…Now I don't care if somebody spit on me. They can spit on me. I just wipe it off and keep going. Not important to me anymore. Not if my life is involved" (Rogers, 1997, p.102). Through this assignment, Larry was able to express how an incident in his life shaped who he was and who he wanted to be in the future.

Identities also influence the ways in which students interpret various types of texts and interactions about texts. Enciso (1998) stated that many students read texts that describe "versions of the world" that are "in conflict with themselves and others" (p. 13). Working with fourth and fifth graders who were reading *Maniac McGee*, she met with a group of students who brought various perspectives based on race, gender, class, politics,

intellects, and linguistics. She worked in the group to see how they built interpretations and voiced opinions in relation to one another, the book, and the author even though they had personal histories and perceptions of difference. Two students in particular, Marisa and Richard, developed meanings of the novel by constructing a viable setting for resistance to prejudices and racism. They "talk[ed] back to the text" by relating it to social movement, like the civil rights.

Literacy research found that adolescents often used literacy as a tool to represent their various identities in particular situations (Enciso, 1998; Finders, 1997). In a study about the literacy habits of adolescent girls, Finders (1997) found that a particular book or folded note could signify membership into various social circles. Oftentimes the young women would not read the books they carried but instead use their covers to position them in ways that made social life in school easier. She also found that their gendered identities as females caused them to read more novels whereas the males in their classes tended to read more newspapers and sports-related items. Moje (2000) also discovered in her study of adolescent gang members that they used graffiti and tagging to gain power and status in their community. She found that because these students were often marginalized in their classrooms by being associated with deviance and violence, they used these alternative forms of literacy to make their voices heard and claim spaces for themselves.

Although some research has shown examples of identity work, many researchers found that students are not given enough time in class to explore their identities through literacy discussions (Broughton & Fairbanks, 2003; Finders, 1997; Moje, 2000). Finders

(1997) reported that her young girls were rarely afforded the opportunity to talk about the narrow standards of beauty portrayed in the teen magazines they frequently read. She suggested that all students need more opportunities to discuss how media influences the development of their identities. Broughton and Fairbanks (2003) also found within two case studies of adolescent females that although the school definitely played a part in reshaping and shaping their identities, students rarely had opportunities to talk about identity work in relation to literacy. Moje (2000) suggested that if more opportunities were available for students to do identity work in relation to literature, they might be more likely to become "actors in a story" rather than "passive observers of someone else's experience."

Other researchers have found spaces where students are given this opportunity to explore their identities in relation to literacy (Alvermann et al., 1999; Beach, 1998). Alvermann et al. (1999) used music in a high school literature classroom to challenge students to broaden their perspectives about gender identities. By examining songs and photos of The Spice Girls and Natalie Imbruglia, she found that many students recognized that musicians, despite their music, used sex to sell albums. Even though most students agreed that Natalie Imbruglia's lyrics broadened the definition of gender, they recognized that many musicians needed to fall under the narrow standards of beauty in order to sell music. These discussions opened spaces for both females and males to talk about the ways in which our society defines gender.

Although these opportunities are provided, students will sometimes resist for various reasons. Beach et al. (2003) researched the resistance of multicultural literature

in an urban high school. For example, several of the White male students in a high school English classroom resisted challenges from female students about their allegiances to the discourses operating in the larger school and community discourses. In one discussion, one White male showed disdain for Native American characters in *Love Medicine* by referring to them as "'drunk, incest people' who lacked control over their lives" (p. 12). However, Beach et al. (2003) found that some of the students in the study moved beyond stances of resistance by exploring their own beliefs and attitudes in regard to racism through writing about multicultural literature. For example, one White female student stated that after a discussion on affirmative action, she realized that "earlier hurdles" and "where you come from" could make it difficult to "get along in life," despite scholarships "and all that good stuff" (p. 17). These writings allowed the students to broaden their perspectives about racial identities. Beach et al. (2003) suggested that teachers need to help resistant students empathize with character's perceptions by providing a space to talk about issues that shape their everyday lives. Enciso (1998) also found that adolescent females were able to resist the good/bad storyline of females through a discussion of Sweet Valley Twins: Best Friends. The study suggested that although resistance can open moments for change and transformation, those tensions can make students vulnerable because refusing a storyline "and one's place in it, usually means refusing recognition as a person" (p. 55).

When teachers provide opportunities for identity work in the classroom, students are likely to find the work more relevant and meaningful because it makes connections to their daily lives. As I observed Gina in her classroom, I paid attention to how she

provided these opportunities and took note of how these opportunities shaped students' identities and literacy practices.

Language and Identity in a Figured World

Language is one of the means by which figured worlds are "evoked, collectively developed, individually learned, and made socially and personally powerful" (p.61). In other words, language is frequently used to shape the figured world of the classroom, students, and teacher and typically serves as a medium used for identity construction. To describe the link between language and identity Gee (1996) used the term "Discourse" to describe language that includes "ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes" (p. 142). A figured world determines what kind of Discourse is appropriate or inappropriate. For teachers, talk is a "central tool of their trade. With it they mediate children's activity and experience, and help them make sense of learning, literacy, life, and themselves" (p. 4).

Researchers found that the most common form of talk in the classroom is led by the teacher in an Initiation Response Evaluation (IRE) or Initiation Response Feedback (IRF) pattern (Cazden, 2001; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Wells, 1999). Mehan (1982) found this teacher-talk to occur approximately 66% of the time in classrooms. Researchers found this type of talk to be useful because it makes pertinent information apparent to students, allows teachers to assess students' status of knowledge, and models the use of academic discourse (Cazden, 2001; Christoph and Nystrand, 2001; Wells, 1999). Further examination found that the consistent use of teacher-talk can exclude non-

mainstream students from the conversations because they favor the teacher's interpretation (Cazden, 2001). Although teacher-led talk may work for particular lessons and learners, it is important for teachers to recognize benefits from other types of literature discussions (Cazden, 2001).

A move away from teacher-directed talk encourages students to become leaders and active participants of talk (Cazden, 2001; Wells, 1999). If discussion follows a democratic style of conversation, students are allowed more opportunities to engage in discussion topics that are relevant and important to their lives. Because student-led talk accepts alternative answers, more perspectives are heard in the classroom, which validates the diverse experiences and opinions of students. By talking about their experiences and interests, studies have found that students are better able to solve problems through language (Wells, 1999). Talk between students creates more episodes of cognitive conflict with self that increase engagement because students are more likely to contradict, complement, ask questions, and receive help from others, which promotes a greater amount of talk than in more conventional settings (Au, 1981; Lewis, 1997).

Oftentimes student-led talk can fail if students exclude each other from the conversations. Recent research focused on strategies that teachers use to support students throughout the engagement of talk in heterogenous groups (Cazden, 2001; Maloch, 2002). Cazden (2001) suggested that in order to reduce exclusions in discussions, teachers should focus on open-ended questions instead of right and wrong answers and request that multiple skills be used so that diverse students are able to contribute to the group. In addition, Maloch (2002) found teacher scaffolding to be important for

encouraging conversations in the classroom. In her study, teachers prepared students for discussions by explicitly stating conversation ground rules, scaffolding students' appropriation of the discussion process, and using intervention strategies, such as directives and elicitations, to engage students in ongoing dialogue.

Mercer (2000) suggested that students are able to learn in groups if teachers explicitly state the ground rules of classroom talk. He recommended that teachers never assume that students know how to discuss and encouraged them to provide explicit guidelines and use good techniques, such as debriefing and shifting into the role of a facilitator. Mercer (2000) was influenced by Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Bruner's (1975) scaffolding which both believe that it is important for learners to be given sufficient support in learning a new skill so that they can become proficient and eventually masters of the skill (Mercer, 2000; Wells, 1999). He took these ideas further by discussing the Intermental Development Zone, which focuses on the contributions of both the student and teacher in learning through language in order to share knowledge and build joint understanding. Ground rules are a form of scaffolding. His research found that the teacher stressed various ground rules to students to ensure its occurrence. First, the teacher shared all relevant information and suggestions. Second, students were required to provide reasons to back up assertions, opinions, and suggestions. Third, students were encouraged to ask for reasons when appropriate. Fourth, reaching an agreement about which action to take, if possible, was expected. Fifth, the teacher and students viewed the group rather than an individual member as responsible for decisions and actions and for any successes and failures that ensued. As Mercer stated, these

guidance or scaffolding strategies do not guarantee success and may work differently in various contexts.

Ground rules can also be used to promote discussion in small groups. In his observations of small group work in classrooms, Mercer (2000) found that students typically engage in three types of talk when trying to build knowledge. Disputational talk is considered to be argumentative and competitive in which participants are concentrating only on their interests. Cumulative talk is non-competitive and is typically interested in agreement of the entire groups. Exploratory talk uses critique and evaluation to enable members of the group to share their perspectives so that the entire group can weigh the voices and reach a joint understanding. He also called exploratory talk a form of productive talk, which allows partners to engage in each other's ideas critically and constructively. Although each kind of talk builds shared knowledge, exploratory talk makes reasoning more visible and knowledge is made more accountable. He later suggested ground rules and other techniques that teachers can use to encourage their students to become involved in exploratory talk.

Although these ground rules for exploratory talk were successful for the students in his studies, it is necessary to ask questions about them in relation to diverse students. For example, it is important to ask what the ground rules are and who makes them in a diverse classroom with a White teacher so that issues of power that inhibit conversation can be revealed. Gee helps to answer these questions, although he does not specifically discuss the use of language in high school classrooms. Gee's theories politicize rule-making in classroom discussions because they recognize the relationship of power and

language and realize that language is situated socially, culturally, and historically. Thus, if the teacher is the only one making the rules, students are likely to misunderstand and be excluded or silenced.

Gee (2005) used three concepts to describe various influences on talk. First, he believed that people come to social situations with cultural models or videotapes in a person's mind that gives a simplistic explanation of words and phrases. When students come to the classroom with a different cultural model than the teacher, her ground rules for conversation may not make sense to the student, causing him or her to be left out or disrupt the discussion and perhaps learning. Gee (2005) recently recognized that the term cultural models is problematic because "not everyone who shares a given model is a member of all the same cultures and not everyone in some larger culture shares all the same models" (p. 61). Thus, he replaced the term with "Discourse models." Second, Gee suggested that people use social languages or talk that is connected to a place, time, and person. In other words, various types of talk are used in particular settings. If students are not familiar with the rules of social languages in classroom discussions, they are likely to use inappropriate language during classroom discussions, which may lead to misunderstandings and silencing. Third, Gee stated that people use situated meanings or the negotiation in the meaning of words depending on the context and past experiences to participate in conversations. When students and teachers have different experiences and views of the context, they are likely to view the rules and discourse of the classroom in different and sometimes contrasting ways. It can be argued that when the teacher makes the rules explicit, students will understand how to talk in the classroom; however, just

because rules are stated, it does not mean that students will understand how to implement them. In addition, it does not ensure that students will agree with and follow the rules. Students and teacher would benefit from creating ground rules for conversations together so that everyone in the classroom has the opportunity to become a participant. This literature supports the need for teachers to investigate the backgrounds of students and invite them to be part of the rule-making process for how talk occurs in the classroom.

This theoretical framework about literacy, identity, and figured worlds suggests that research needs to pay attention to the power issues in conversations. I used this literature to analyze how Gina used talk to create the figured world of the classroom and position herself and students in particular ways. In addition, I drew on this research to better understand how students used language to position themselves and others in particular ways in the classroom.

WHITE TEACHERS IN DIVERSE SCHOOLS

The following literature provides insight into strategies that teachers have used to provide opportunities for diverse students to become part of the figured world of the classroom. This research provides insight into my study by making evident strategies that Gina used in her classroom to shape a space that values and cultivates the cultural resources of her Latino/a and African American students. First, I describe research that explains strategies specifically geared towards White teachers and diverse students, such as culturally relevant pedagogy and critical literacy. Second, I describe research about new spaces for learning that bridge home and school cultures. These strategies reflect teacher beliefs and values of the school that make up the figured world of the classroom.

The strategies mentioned in this section are meant to connect with student interests and motivations so that the cultural and social gaps between diverse students and a White teacher are narrowed.

Pedagogy in Diverse Classrooms

Because the majority of teachers are White in diverse urban schools, the social, economic, and cultural gaps between students and teachers can inhibit learning. Scholars believe that urban schools need more teachers of color, specifically those who come from the community because they have a better understanding of the students (Gay, 2000; Foster, 2001). In addition, a diverse faculty can also foster broad perceptions of teachers and help departments develop a variety of strategies to teach diverse students (Gay, 2000; Sleeter, 1995). However, many literacy educators found that White teachers can be successful with diverse students if they gain a better understanding of the cultural background of their students (Anyon, 1997; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Cazden (1996), who went back to teaching as a White teacher in a diverse San Diego school, found that she did three things to overcome cultural barriers. First, she overlapped her life with the life of the students by walking students home or seeing them at a local candy store. Second, she built a shared life in the classroom by creating memorable events such as inviting visiting speakers to talk to the students. Third, she avoided activities that increased the distance between her and the students such as saying the pledge of allegiance. Although she felt that she could never be a true insider, she found that she could be familiar, which earned her trust and the ability to educate the students.

Many educators suggest culturally responsive teaching when teaching diverse learners (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nieto, 2002; Moll and Greenburg, 1990). This type of teaching recognizes the importance of including the cultural perspectives and backgrounds of students in all aspects of learning (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Educators suggest several characteristics of a culturally responsive teacher. First, constant communication with parents is suggested so that teachers are able to gain a better idea of the students' background knowledge and abilities and learning preferences (Moll and Greenburg, 1990). Second, high expectations are advised for all learners because they produce a classroom that respects students' capabilities. Lipman (1996) found that teachers who hold high expectations typically get high student achievement. Rather than buying into the deficit myth of minorities, successful teachers in diverse classrooms were found to see strengths in students where others saw weaknesses (Lipman, 1996; Orellana & Bowman, 2003).

Third, learning that occurs through the context of culture by varying teaching strategies and bridging cultural differences through effective communication is recommended. Fourth, student-centered instruction is suggested because it promotes student engagement and encourages a community of learners. Fifth, culturally mediated instruction that incorporates diverse ways of knowing, understanding, and representing information is helpful because it represents the lives and backgrounds of students (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2002). As mentioned by Paley (1979), lessons that relate to the cultural experiences of students produce student engagement, whereas ignorance of cultural differences can cause student resistance. Sixth, curriculum should be reshaped so that it

is integrated, interdisciplinary, meaningful, and student-centered. Rather than making assumptions about the students based on their race, gender, sexuality, or class, they encourage teachers to gather information from the students as individuals (Gay, 2000; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003).

Last, culturally relevant teaching recommends that teachers should act as a facilitator to develop a learning environment that is relevant and reflective of their students' social, cultural, and linguistic experiences. It is also important that teachers share information about their backgrounds in order to build relationships with students. Fine (1991) found that many non-minority teachers felt uncomfortable sharing their personal and cultural worlds with diverse students for fear of offending them. This silence made it difficult for students and teachers to develop trust in the classroom. White teachers might feel more comfortable sharing personal stories if they become more involved in critical self-analysis and self-reflection about the ways in which race, class, gender, and sexuality influence the learning and language of various students (Gibson, 2004; McIntyre, 1997).

Educators have also suggested using critical literacy strategies in diverse classrooms (Frieire, 1993; Hagood, 2002; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Shor, 1992). The key component of critical literacy is dialogue in which Freire (2001) believed that people transformed the world around them through dialogue. According to critical literacy, classrooms should be student-centered but teacher-directed, so that democratic participation exists (Hagood, 2002; Shor, 1992). Students and teachers should also become active participants rather than passive consumers (hooks, 1995). Lewison, Flint,

and Van Sluys (2002) explained that critical literacy uses four interrelated dimensions: (a) disruption of commonplace assumptions, (b) investigation of multiple viewpoints, (c) examination sociopolitical issues, and (d) focus on social change and transformation. The use of critical literacy techniques can provide a way for students to participate in classroom conversations. In addition, the exploration of issues related to race, class, gender, and sexuality can lessen the gap between students and teacher and provide opportunities for the construction of multiple identities. Fecho (2004) used critical inquiry to capitalize on cultural backgrounds in an environment for learning. He taught students to recognize the ways in which language positions them so that they could learn how to decode texts they are likely to encounter in their future. Fecho (2004) suggested that when students make meaning out of texts, they are making meaning of themselves "in relation to that story and ultimately to the world they live in. They are constructing identity. The more complex the dialogue, the more complex these identities and the individual's conception of the world with which those identities transact" (p. 109).

In addition, teachers in urban schools promote the future success of diverse students by using what Cazden (2001) described as the two-pronged approach, which emphasizes the need to teach students the codes of the mainstream so that they can use those codes to become successful participants in society. It is also important to discuss the arbitrariness of these codes and help students become aware of the culture of power (Delpit, 2002). Au and Raphael (2000) suggested that teachers help students learn home, formal, and professional discourses by guiding them through the study of different forms of English. Students' cultures should be cultivated, but not to the point that students'

success in society is forgotten. Many educators found that teaching approaches which incorporate the language and everyday lives of students and invest in forms of literacy that are found in communities and cultural identities of students enhance learning within literacy events (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Lee et al., 2003). Valenzuela (2005) suggested that Latino/a students in particular would benefit from increased communication between home and school, more Latino/a teachers, and improved personal interactions between teachers and students that value the cultures of their Latino/a students.

This literature provides insight into strategies that educators can use when teaching students of various backgrounds and cultures. Although social, cultural, and historical factors may cause barriers, there are ways for White teachers to break down some of these barriers so that diverse students are part of the classroom culture. This research served as a guide when observing and analyzing how Gina, a White teacher, worked with Latino/a and African American students in the figured world of her classroom

A Space for New Possibilities

Holland et al. (1998) explained that identities can be transformed and new worlds can be authored. Although many factors played a part in the construction of Gina's classroom, there are ways in which the teacher and students can envision and create a new space that capitalizes on the diversity in the classroom. For me, this creation is similar to what Gutierrez (1999) called "third space." She used this term to describe a classroom that bridges home and school for students. Moje (2004) encouraged educators

to draw upon all aspects of third space theories by viewing classrooms as a bridge or a navigational space that allows for alternative discourses, and as a space that challenges and reshapes literacy practices. This third space allows students to draw from multiple resources and allows flexibility rather than fixed boundaries in the classroom. The teacher is more likely to allow ruptures in the classroom to be negotiated so that alternative voices can be heard. Rather than choosing an alternative space outside the classroom to use literacy, a third space allows students to use both private and public voices to make sense of lessons. Phelps & Weaver (1999) described private voices as words that are used to express their thoughts, feelings and preferences to people. Public voices are considered contributions to the "public discourse" of the classroom (p. 323). Phelps & Weaver (1999) argued that the classroom should be a place in which students have the opportunity to use their personal and private voices to "merge their own thoughts and opinions freely into the give and take of the classroom…" (p. 325). However, it is important to remember that bringing private voices into public spaces is complicated because voices are "strongly influenced by competing discourses within the classroom" (p. 350). Thus, options should be available for students to express both public and privates voices in the ways in which they prefer.

This merging of voices in a classroom portrays the ways in which language is identity, power, and participation in a classroom setting. For educators, a third space enables them to look beyond binaries, such as academic and everyday, and generate new knowledge and discourse (Soja, 1996). Because students take up and resist the privileged language of academics, their identity and selfhood is challenged. Throughout this

struggle, new discourses and literacies are created, and "newness enters" the figured world (Bhabha, 1984). These new discourses and literacies made the third space of the classroom, which broadens possibilities of learning for students.

The concept of third space makes connections with Moll and Greenburg's (1990) notion of funds of knowledge, defined as the intellectual and social knowledge existing in families and communities. These funds are what students bring and use within a classroom space. Moll and Greenburg (1990) encouraged teachers to connect classrooms to outside resources so that classrooms become a more advanced context for teaching and learning. These funds from home or peers shape literacy events and identities (Moje, 2004). This study described how one successful teacher connected literacy to the social world by allowing students to create their own learning situations, such as visiting a historical site or producing a videotape. For example, in one case study of Elena, a fifth grade student bilingual student, chose to write about an interesting topic in which she already had prior knowledge (Moll and Greenburg, 1990). Thus, Elena chose to write about what a school in Ponce, Puerto Rico might be like. To extend her ideas outside of the classroom, Elena's teacher helped her create a video about her home city, Tuscon, for classmates in Puerto Rico. Thus, Elena was able to bridge her school and everyday literacies within the classroom space. Dyson (1999) used intertextuality to allow a space for students to bring in their social worlds in their writing. These techniques opened more zones of possibilities for diverse students. By providing opportunities to use cultural and social resources in the classroom, students might be more likely to create a

classroom space that fits their needs and interests and becomes more of an authentic learning experience.

These zones of possibilities and third spaces are likely to open new opportunities for students in classroom where possibilities do not normally exist. Maloch (2005) explored how a classroom provided opportunities for students to reconstruct their identities through literacy events. She found that with teacher support, two African American males gradually appropriated the conversational norms of the literature discussion groups so that they were able to become participants in the literature discussions. She suggested that by providing more opportunities for students to engage in conversations in the classroom, the road was widened and possibilities for their success in school were opened.

Linda Christensen (1994) built a new space for her students by redefining her classroom community. She found that in her classroom, students were "getting along" by acting like someone they were not and silencing some of their perspectives for fear that it might "rock the boat" (p. 52). By explicitly talking about these issues of power, she redefined her classroom community, and taught students how to "live in someone else's skin, understand the parallels of hurt, struggle, and joy across class and cultural lines and work for change" (p. 54). Although this classroom was not a space in which all students agreed, it became a place where students were able to discuss pertinent issues and learn how to promote change within their lives. She created a new space or community in her room by "helping students excavate and reflect on personal experiences, connect(ing) it to the world of language, literature, and society. We moved from ideas to action, perhaps

the most elusive objective in any classroom" (p. 54). Christenesen's space was built on the bridge of home and school, taking action, and revealing issues of power in the classroom. These studies provide insight into the ways in which teachers provide opportunities for students to position and imagine themselves in new ways in various classrooms. This research attempts to make sense of how a White teacher and students of color work together to create a new space in which students imagined and positioned themselves in new ways, examined tensions to promote change within their local contexts, and transformed the structure and content of the classroom to fit their needs and interests. Opportunities for identity exploration shaped this space into one that drew upon the cultural and social resources of students. Thus, I explore how Gina and her students created this figured world and how students negotiated identities within the classroom space.

Chapter Three

Methods

> Ethnographies provide the landscapes and the details of the world.
> (Purcell-Gates, 2004, p.92)

Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks discussed in the previous sections, this chapter describes and justifies the methodological theories and techniques used in this study to investigate how opportunities for identity exploration occurred in this particular classroom. I begin this chapter with an explanation for my decisions about the methodological design of the study. To provide context to the research, I describe the site, participants, and field entry. Following these discussions, I explain in detail the data collection and data analysis techniques. Finally, I address trustworthiness criteria, ethical issues, and strengths and limitations of the study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The methodological framework for this study draws on ethnographic theory and discourse analysis. For this study, ethnographic research provided a method that viewed "literacy development, instruction, and learning as it occurred naturally in a sociocultural context" (Purcell-Gates, 2004, p. 92). Discourse analysis provided a means to study classroom talk and written text and the relationship between students' identities and literacy practices within opportunities for identity exploration.

Ethnographic Methodology

I was drawn to ethnography as a methodology because it is grounded in theories that view literacy as a social practice. Ethnographers aim to "describe human behavior

holistically and look for patterns and themes that can be used to enhance their own understandings of similar contexts" (Purcell-Gates, 2004, p. 92). The point of ethnographic research is to "re-create for the reader the shared beliefs, artifacts, folk knowledge, and behaviors of some group of people" (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993, pp. 2-3). This methodology documents social life as a process and expects that one immerse herself in a context. An ethnography calls for research questions that ask "*why, what is happening, what does it look like*, and *how does it work"* (Purcell-Gates, 2004, p. 94). In this study, I sought to understand what identity exploration *looked like* in a classroom and *how* it might shape students' literacy practices and identities.

To understand people's lived experiences, ethnographic methods help researchers explore social practices in a given context through extended, in-depth participant-observations in a particular setting, self-reflective recording of such observations, and theoretically-informed interpretations of the observation (Corsaro, 1985; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Over the five months of observation in Gina's classroom, I shifted in and out of the roles of researcher and teacher. While observing, I used thick description to create portraits of the classroom and students (Geertz, 1973). I focused on everyday actions in the classroom in order to "examine how students and teachers perform their identities and their politics in the seemingly mundane ritualized activities that make sup school life" (Lewis, 2001, p. 71). This type of examination helped me to re-examine fixed concepts of identity and literacy and reveal the societal and institutional forces that helped shape the practice of literacy and identity in this classroom (Trueba, 2002). Overall, the use of ethnographic methodology helped explore the ways in which identity

shapes and is shaped by literacy practices in this classroom through the "telling of a story" that brought together the pieces or threads of meaning into a whole (Purcell-Gates, 2004, p. 111).

Discourse Analysis

Close attention to the use of naturally occurring language of participants is essential to most ethnographic research because it serves as a resource to interpret local and social meanings and practices (Mehan, 1982). For that reason, I framed this study around an ethnographic approach and used methods of discourse analysis to analyze text and talk within various literacy events that occurred in the classroom. Developed from Heath's (1983) study about language development in home and school communities, Florio-Ruane and Morrell (2004) define literacy events as the "situations and activities in which written and literate practices are central to classroom talk" (p. 47). In this section of the chapter, I provide reasons for choosing discourse analysis for this study. Later in the chapter, I will provide a more detailed explanation of discourse analysis methods that helped me answer my research questions.

As Cazden (2001) explained, language is central to the classroom and has three major functions: propositional, social, and expressive. She explained that discourse analysis is the study of situated language in a social setting. Researchers look for patterns in how language affects knowledge, how language affects equalities and inequalities in the classroom, and how language patterns assume and foster particular communication competencies.

Gee (1996) argued that language is an "identity kit" that signals membership in particular groups. Students may use talk as a way of indexing their membership in their school, home, and peer worlds. The classroom can be considered a community that brings diverse people together through language to foster the learning of language codes and literacy practices. This diverse collection of voices can be both a resource and a challenge. Learning to talk in the classroom is not only about taking turns but is also about reshaping power relations, identity, and social norms (Florio-Ruane and Morrell, 2004). Since people constitute themselves through language in this study, discourse analysis helped to illustrate how students constructed their identities within Gina's classroom (Davies and Harré, 1990).

For this study's exploration of the relationship between literacy and identity, I drew from two approaches of discourse analysis: interactional sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis. First, researchers within interactional sociolinguistics argue that people perform or present themselves based on the cultural values, norms, and expectations of the context that surrounds them. The purpose of this approach is to analyze fact-to-face interactions in order to understand the social, cultural, and expressive meanings that occur in situated contexts (Johnstone, 2002). Goffman (1974), a figure who heavily influenced this approach, examined the presentation of self by analyzing footing, or a person's alignment/stance in relation to others. His dramaturgical approach argued that interactions were performances that were shaped by the environment and audience. During performances, people act in ways that provide others with "impressions" that are consistent with their objectives. Within these performances,

Goffman argued that we play a role, such as teacher/pupil. Davies and Harré (1990) drew from Goffman's work by proposing an analysis that examined how people position themselves (reflexive positioning) and position others (interactive positioning) to better understand a personal-social identity. Moving away from the static view of a role, the use of "positions" as descriptor highlights the fluidity of identity construction and negotiation. Davies and Harré (1990) believed that a position is what is "created in and through talk as the speakers and hearers take themselves up as persons" (p. 105). By extracting the storylines or autobiographical aspects of the conversation, we can identify how people conceive themselves and others through their positionings. They argued that,

> If we are to come close to understanding how it is that people actually interact in everyday life, we need the metaphor of an unfolding narrative, in which we are constituted in one position or another within the course of one story or even come to stand in multiple or contradictory positions, or in which we negotiate a new position by "refusing" the position that the opening rounds of a conversation have made available to us. (Davies and Harré, 1990, p. 96)

Through an analysis of positioning, I was better able to understand how students' discursive practices constituted them in particular ways and were used as resources to negotiate new positions in this classroom.

Second, I drew from a critical discourse analysis approach because it focuses on how language is a cultural tool that mediates "relationships of power and privilege in social interaction, institutions, and bodies of knowledge" (Rogers, 2004, p. 367). For this aspect of analysis, I used techniques from Gee's (2005) tools of inquiry, or ways of looking at the world of talk and interaction because they offered insight into power issues behind how students' identities shaped and were shaped by literacy practices. He

suggested using the following three categories of analysis: situated meanings, social languages, and Discourse (cultural) models. This analysis provided insight into the situated identities of the students in the classroom, which subsequently provided an understanding of possible reasons why students positioned themselves and others in particular ways in the classroom. Further description of this analysis will be described in the data analysis section.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine how identity exploration occurred in a high school English classroom with a White teacher and African American and Latino/a students. The study investigated the following questions:

- How does identity exploration occur in this high school English classroom with a White teacher and African American and Latino/a students?
- How does the teacher facilitate opportunities for identity exploration in this classroom?
- What is the relationship between students' identities and literacy practices within literacy events that provide opportunities for identity exploration?

RESEARCH SITE AND PARTICIPANTS

Because this study focused on the identities or "history-in-person" of the students, it is important to provide a detailed description of the city, school, and classroom spaces or "figured" worlds that played a part in shaping those identities. This section is meant to provide context and a better understanding of students' particular social practices and perspectives that they carried with them to school and individual classrooms. I begin

with a broad description of the neighborhood and school in order to make the point that students' mediation of various worlds, such as home, peer, and school, played a part in how students positioned themselves and others in Gina's classroom. In addition, I detail particular tensions in these figured worlds in order to highlight conflicts that the students potentially bring with them to their classroom. By tensions, I mean struggles or conflicts that students deal with in their various social worlds (Beach and Meyers, 2001). For example, Beach and Meyers (2001) described a student who wrote about conflicts and tensions within her family world, "such as the significance of her mother, the absence of her father, and her tricultural heritage" (p. 3). English classrooms can become a space in which students "construct, contest, and maintain social worlds through language and symbols, " (p. 3). Part of students' identity work in Gina's classroom included the examination of tensions and ways in which they might make changes to reduce the conflicts they deal with in local contexts.

An Eastside Urban Neighborhood

History

The culture of Rushmore High School was shaped by the culture of the surrounding community, the Eastside neighborhood. The city's population began with a variety of immigrant groups from Germany, Sweden, and Mexico. During the mid-1900s, large numbers of immigrants fled unrest during the Mexican Revolution increasing the city's population of immigrants from Mexico in the city. Now, Latino/as make up nearly 35% of the city's population. The Eastside of the city is the most culturally and ethnically diverse section of town. More than half of the students in school

are Latino/as, and both African Americans and Latino/as play major roles in areas of the community. As early as the 1890s a distinct color line could be seen in the city. The town was originally divided by what locals called the "wide street," which has now been developed into a major highway that divides groups culturally and economically. African American and Latino/as populations were pushed out of downtown towards the east side of town when White city planners began to develop valuable downtown land. As incomes increased, White, Eastside residents, moved west and north in new areas. The divisions became more formal when a consulting firm advised that the city designate the Eastside as a "Negro" district (Humphrey, 2001). While this formal distinction no longer exists, the majority of current Eastside residents are from various backgrounds, including new immigrants to the city who view this part of the city as a starting place for a new life in the United States.

The Physical Space

In the area surrounding Rushmore, businesses line the highways, while neighborhoods are tucked in between open spaces, churches, and a few elementary and middle schools. Many local businesses, such as taquerías and discotecas, line the major street next to the school. In addition, pawn shops and quick-loan stores are situated next to these local businesses. At the corner of a major highway, day laborers frequently stand outside a major hardware store looking for temporary jobs. Several apartment buildings and duplexes surround the school's neighborhood. Houses range in style, ages, and size. Some homes are brick with edging painted in colorful yellows or greens, while others are stone with natural colors. A Housing Authority Community is located near the school

with an outdoor playground for kids. A few new homes are dispersed throughout the neighborhood and stand out because of their modern design and two-level structure.

Economy

Residents have started to revitalize some neighborhoods in Eastside, but this revitalization comes with a price: increased taxes and property values. With a higher cost of living, residents have been pushed farther outside of the community. However, the North Eastside, closest to Rushmore, remains one of the most affordable and least developed areas in the city. This community is not being revitalized to the same extent as other neighborhoods in Central and South Eastside.

The cities' major industries include government and high-tech companies. Many residents of the Eastside have created their own employment opportunities while fostering the culture of their community by starting their own businesses. For example, several businesses along the Eastside are owned by African American and Latino/a residents. These businesses include local markets, taqueírias, and discotecas. In addition, several residents are artists, specifically musicians, who were drawn to the city for its opportunities in the live music business.

Tensions in an Eastside Neighborhood

The above description of the history, physical space, and economy provide a context to the tensions described below. Many of the North Eastside tensions are similar to the tensions or conflicts that students experienced at Rushmore High School. These experiences and conflicts played a part in how students became part of their academic world. The next section highlights the following three areas of tension that members of

the neighborhood deal with on a daily basis: segregation and racism, immigration, and violence and safety.

Segregation and Racism

One of the tensions that residents of the Eastside experience is segregation and racism. First, the majority of the residents are African American and Latino/as, while the majority of the residents on the Westside of town are White. In addition, although the Eastside is home to both African Americans and Latino/as, these groups do not always intermingle. This racial divide is reflected in how African Americans and Latino/as situated themselves inside the school. Freddy, a Latino student in Gina's on-level English classroom, moved from a high school in the center of the city to Rushmore. He explained that it was difficult to make new friends in the community because he was different.

Vetter: Did it take a long time to make friends?

Freddy: It is way different. Kind of=

Vetter: =You can get along with anyone.

Freddy: Only if they are willing to get along with me.

Vetter: They aren't willing to hang out with you after class. Why is that?

Freddy: Because of my skin color, appearance, probably the way I dress. No one will come talk to me (Transcribed interview, 3.28.06).

Although Freddy is Latino, he and his family have been living in the United States for several generations. Thus, he did not speak Spanish and the Latino/a culture was not a prominent part of his life. Freddy's social practices made it difficult for him to make

friends at Rushmore because his hobbies and appearance were different than those of his classmates.

Because this issue was a constant tension in the community, community activists have decided to do something about it by inviting both communities to celebrate cultural festivities like Mexican Independence Day and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Their goal is to make the Eastside into one big community rather than many fragmented groups. This exchange between communities is an attempt to begin dialogue, learn about each other's backgrounds, and organize cross-culturally. In addition, activists hope to raise awareness in youth about the importance of building connections between cultures. Another project called *East **** Stories* creates documentaries based on the lives of people from the Eastside. People in the project believe in the power of sharing stories and hope that the screening of the short documentaries will create a "bridge between people locally as well as the city's borders" (Garrison, 2002). The viewing of the short films at local venues has increased from an audience of ten people to an average of 150 people. In addition, the documentaries have been shown at local film festivals and are available online.

Immigration

Many people from the Latino/a community came to this city to make a better life for their families. Issues of language and poverty play a part in the struggle for that "American dream." In 2006, the immigration-rights debate directly affected the neighborhood surrounding Rushmore High School. Reports of raids occurred in the predominately Latino/a neighborhoods around the school, which caused some families to be afraid to send their children to school. Raul, a student from Gina's classroom,

attended an immigration march to protest the proposed immigration reforms. He eagerly told me about it in an informal interview. When asked about the proposed wall between Mexico and the United States, Raul expressed his opinion:

> Raul: And I think that's wrong, well personally, I think it is wrong because if you look at everybody who does the hard labor its Mexicans, Hispanics, including all Hispanics, we are always doing hard labor, but we're not innocent neither you know.
>
> Vetter: Sure, yeah=
>
> Raul: =Like we all make mistakes and stuff, but you know its hard enough being Mexican and then you know having everyone blaming you for whatever happens and well today was just to prove that if not every Mexican goes to work and if there weren't any Mexicans here or Hispanic people here the economy wouldn't grow (Transcribed video, 4.10.06).

Raul also talked about what it was like for some of his family who still lived in Mexico.

> Raul: Where I come from you know there's, there's like not everybody is rich. The only people who are rich are drug dealers or people who have a big business. And um there are houses made out of um, people still live like in the 1800's like in cardboard, like sheet metal houses, there's not really a wooden house, you wouldn't see (.) and everybody just grows their own food so they can eat (Transcribed video, 4.10.06).

As Raul suggested, the tensions of immigration included complex issues of respect, worker's rights, racism, class, and economic survival.

Safety and Violence

Typical assumptions about the Eastside neighborhoods are related to violence, drugs, gangs, and other criminal activities. Some people in the city are afraid to cross the highway and enter the Eastside because of these assumptions. The community has created several programs to deal with issues related to criminal activity. For example, the

members of community created a project for youth, **** *Life Stories*, that provide spaces and resources for students to create stories about the city as they visit various areas of town. In a documentary, middle-school students stated that they were involved in this project at the local community center to "just to have something to do" and to keep themselves out of trouble (Goodrich, Grafe, & Ponce, ND).

The Eastside community is struggling to both hold on to and build new traditions. Students within the community deal with these tensions on a daily basis and struggle with them as they shift in and out of their various worlds. These negotiations take place within several institutions throughout the community, including Rushmore High School. Below, I give a broad description of Rushmore and highlight the conflicts of leadership, segregation and racism, immigration, and safety and violence. I end the section with a brief discussion of the ways in which members of the Rushmore community are dealing with these tensions in order to empower their students.

Rushmore High School

Rushmore High School (grades 9-12), built in 1964, is on the North Eastside of the city, next to a major highway. The large buildings are made of brown brick with white borders and the doors are painted blue to represent the school colors. Lockers are situated in outdoor courtyards. Sidewalks line the outdoors, directing students from one building to the other. During the 2005/2006 school year, the school planted new grass and flowers in the front of the building. The flowers are planted in beds along the sidewalk that lead to the administrative center, an office detached from the rest of the buildings. Rushmore has a large sign in the front of the school announcing major events,

such as football games, which are played at the stadium across the street. In addition, their motto "Not Without Honor" is painted in blue on the building. On the side of the building is an old camouflaged aircraft in which the students in Engineer Air Craft Maintenance Course work. Each school in the district has a major program or initiative in which it partners with the community for vocational learning. The programs at Rushmore include, Engineering Graphics, Principals of Technology Electronics Certified Systems, Early Childhood Development, Marketing Biotechnology, and Hotel/Motel Management.

The motto of the school posted on the school's website states that Rushmore, "promotes a positive learning community where our teachers, parents, and community leaders work collaboratively to support the diverse needs of all of our students." In addition, the school's mission is to,

> prepare each student to function successfully in an information oriented, culturally diverse society by providing a safe, orderly learning environment where students are engaged in positive learning experiences that motivate them to maximize their potential.

The majority of the students at Rushmore are Latino/as (64%) and African American (33%), with 3% White and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Alaskan Native. Seventy-eight percent of the students at Rushmore are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program.

Because Rushmore is a low performing school, more money was given to the school to fund programs that helped the community reach their achievement goals. These funds were part of the state's Adequate Yearly Progress (No Child Left Behind) that

requires low-performing schools to provide supplemental educational services to their students in order to raise their performance. The school struggles with its reputation for being a low performing school and for its frequent administrative turnover, high dropout rates, and occasional headline violence.

Tensions in Rushmore High School

Because schools are reflections of our communities, Rushmore's tensions are similar to the tensions in the neighborhood. Issues of leadership, segregation and racism, immigration, and safety and violence provide information about the identities that students struggled to negotiate as they walked from class to class. Below, I describe those conflicts and the ways in which members of the Rushmore community dealt with those tensions.

Leadership

Rushmore High School has struggled to keep a principal for more than one year. The principal during this study was an interim principal until they hired their fifth principal in two years in the fall of 2006. In informal conversations, Gina frequently described her frustration with the lack of leadership in her school. In addition, she believed that it reflected badly on perceptions of the school and made students feel as if no one cared about them or their school. In a February interview, Gina described the beginning of the 2005/2006 as chaotic because the school had no leadership, not even an interim principal. In addition, she said that students often complained about the negative atmosphere of their school, and she felt that this climate was related to the lack of systems in place that were typically organized by administration.

Test Scores and NCLB

Rushmore was considered one of the two low-performing high schools in the district. In 2006, 21% of the seniors failed the districts' mandated standardized test, making them ineligible for graduation. Because Rushmore did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress on standardized tests, students were allowed to transfer from Rushmore to other schools in the area. According to the media, some families felt that is was necessary to take their children out of Rushmore in order to attend Allendale High School, a school noted for its high performance. During data collection, Rushmore was in stage two of NCLB, which required tutoring to low-income students in the school. Because of these low test scores, students at Rushmore struggle to graduate, limiting their ability obtain jobs or attend college. In addition, low performance hurts the reputation of the school and lowers the expectations some staff have for their students. Students in Gina's classroom frequently talked about the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. Lucy, a student in Gina's on-level classroom said that she liked Gina's classroom because she "learned a lot of things that helped us to pass the TAKS." In addition, at the end of school when I asked students what they thought about their year in Gina's classroom, many of them talked about the TAKS test. For example, Freddy stated:

Freddy: I was able to (.) I learned about myself.

Vetter: What did you learn about yourself?

Freddy: Like um, that it takes a long time for me to get into something=

Vetter: =Uh

huh.

Freddy: Especially when it's, well, it takes longer for me to get into something when I'm not interested in it.

Vetter: Oh, that is true for a lot of people. Right?

Freddy: Eventually I ended up getting it done though.

Vetter: Well, once you force yourself to get into it did you feel like it was worth it?

Freddy: Uh, yeah, then I kind of you know like=

Vetter: =Got something out of it?

Freddy: [Nods head yes]. And it shows on my TAKS scores. I made a three on the essay, so… (Transcribed video, 5.17.06)

The test was a prominent part the students' school experiences and was a source of stress for the students who struggled to pass.

Safety and Violence

Many people in the community associate Rushmore with a violent crime that occurred in 2003 on campus. In this event, a female student was stabbed to death by her ex-boyfriend in the hallway. The mother of the victim filed suit against the school under Title IX arguing that the school failed to protect her daughter from student-on-student, in-school harassment. The school struggles with its reputation of violence and has worked hard to promote safety in the school. In an essay that Freddy wrote in Gina's classroom, he stated that one disadvantage with moving to Rushmore was that it is "typically stereotyped as a 'bad' school where people get stabbed 'all the time.'" Other schools on the Westside have endured stabbings, shootings, and fights, but they have not had to deal

with the negative media attention in the same way as Rushmore.

Segregation and Racism

Segregation and racism within the school are also issues that students deal with daily. In an interview, some of Gina's Advanced Placement students described how divided the cafeteria was based on race. We talked about why they thought this segregation existed and what could be done about it.

Keisha: We all segregated. What do you want to talk to us for? Some of 'em do, but not all of 'em.

Hope: You go talk to one of the Mexicans, they gonna look at you like your crazy. Like, why are they talking to me?=

Keisha: =Because they probably felt like the way that same person felt that wrote that quote.

Vetter: What was the quote?

Hope: Something about blacks [thinking they run everything

Terrell: [Thinking, yeah.

Hope: To me, its not like that we just stick together. Just like they stick together.

Vetter: So why do you think people stick together? Why are people in different groups?

Hope: Because everybody got their own reasons for not likin' somebody.

Vetter: So it's about not liking somebody, you think?

Keisha: And our parents have something to do with it.

Vetter: Your parents.

Hope: The way we were raised=

Keisha: =It's not our fault.

Hope: And there's not really anything that could be done. You can try to fix it, but you can only do so much (Transcribed interview, 3.25.06).

Although the students in this interview felt that there was only so much they could do about segregation, they worked on a project to try to integrate African Americans and Latino/as in the school.

In an article from *The ***** Chronicle,* students also described the racism that occurs between students and teachers. Students reported that some teachers think that because of the color of their skin they are "slow or something" or "think they are better than us" (May, 2005, p. 2).

Immigration

During the 2006 immigration debate, massive student walk-outs occurred, with more than 200 high school students from Rushmore protesting the proposed immigration law. As mentioned before, Raul was part of that walk-out. In the same informal interview, he explained that the school supported the volume of students who chose to march. He said, "They didn't let us take our cars cause they said they couldn't ensure our safety so we walked over there with the campus police escorted us." However, as more walk-outs were planned, students were told not to march again during school hours and if they did, they would be considered truant.

It is also important to note that several students who have moved from Mexico speak English as a second language. This tension makes it difficult for students to not

only fit into the social world of the school, but also in the academic world of school that expected students to speak English fluently.

How is Rushmore Dealing with these Tensions?

High School Redesign

Rushmore was one of the schools in the district that is undergoing a High School Redesign Initiative. According to the districts' website, the point of the project is to

> Enhance academic rigor for all students and all programs, to establish positive relationships between the students and adults on our campuses, to demonstrate the relevancy of high school work as preparation for good jobs and successful lives, and develop measurable results with which to gauge progress.

In 2006, some suggestions for the redesign included changing the actual name of the school so that parents would no longer associate the school with low performance and violence. Students were involved in the redesign process and were invited to speak about their needs at several community meetings.

Rushmore Films

Rushmore Films was born out of an after-school film course. The course brings students who are interested in film into an environment where they learn how to make short documentaries and films about events on and off campus. Students created short films about football games, breakdancing at lunch, theater, dance, and more. Some of these films have been entered into the town's film festival.

SPURS

Students Partnering for Undergraduate Rhetoric Success (SPURS) is a pilot program that brings students from high schools with low college-attendance rates into

university writing classes. The goal of the program is to develop a bridge between public schools and universities so that students' skills match university expectations. As part of the program, students receive peer editing from college students on a project typical for a second-year rhetoric class. During my observations, the proposal assignment expected students to define a problem and propose a solution.

These programs are an important reflection of the creative and innovative ways in which the school worked to make changes within their community. Although students in this school deal with several complex tensions in their worlds, it is important that students are also given opportunities to work through these tensions. Gina is part of the Rushmore community that provides such opportunities for students. Her participation in these programs is one of the reasons why I chose to conduct this research in her classroom. After meeting her and observing the ways in which she facilitated opportunities for her students to explore themselves and the world around her, I knew that I would be able to examine my research questions in this particular classroom. In the next section, I describe the physical space of the classroom, Gina, and her students.

The Classroom Space

At Rushmore High School, students were enrolled in either an English III on-level or advanced placement course. Although teachers nominated students they believed were prepared for an advanced class, students were not restricted from enrolling in English III AP. For this study, I chose to work in Gina's English III classroom because I feel that more research needs to highlight the experiences of teachers and students in on-level classrooms.

The Physical Space

In Gina's classroom, students sit at round tables with four chairs. These tables are dispersed around the room and are sometimes rearranged to fit the instruction for the day. A list of assignments for the six-weeks are written in various colors on her white boards in the front of the room. The white walls are covered in posters of famous leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Che Guevara, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King. Student work is posted on the front bulletin board, including "gems" or passages from students writing. A word wall with vocabulary is posted on the other white board on the side of the room. Six computers face the back walls of the room and are used for writing and research. Although Gina's desk and computer are in the back of the room, she is usually found in the front of the room on her stool or walking around from table to table while students are engaged in aspects of the reading/writing workshop.

The fifty-minute class period usually begins with a warm-up. The warm-ups are typically a journal prompt, word of the day, or grammar exercise. When students walk into the room, they start on their warm-up while Gina prepares for class and conferences with individual students. After discussing the warm-up and its connection to the lesson of the day, students are guided into a workshop format that integrates literacy events, such as individualized reading, multigenre research projects, and/or *This I Believe* essays. Because students are encouraged to collaborate and use each other as resources, students talk and move around the room freely. In addition, literacy events are often taken outside of the classroom into the library, computer lab, hallway or lecture hall where guest speakers are invited to share their stories.

The Teacher

Gina became a teacher three years ago after she was alternatively certified at a local university. During her undergraduate education, Gina majored in English and minored in Education. Both of Gina's parents were teachers which made her hesitant to enter the profession because she was aware of the time commitment and stress that teaching required. Gina's first job out of college was as a technical writer at a large local corporation. After a few years in that field, Gina realized that she was unhappy and decided to apply for a teaching job in the local district. Gina was hired by Rushmore High School and received her emergency certification at a local university during her first two years as a teacher. Although she lived in the school's neighborhood and saw students walk to and from school, Gina was not aware of the school's history nor had she heard about the tensions of racism and violence that surrounded the school.

During this study, Gina had been teaching for three years, all of which were spent teaching English literature courses at Rushmore High School. Although she described her first year as being extremely difficult, she felt that her colleagues in the English department helped her to grow and become successful with her students. At Rushmore, the English department consisted of a majority of young, White teachers who had recently graduated from the local university and were certified English teachers. Because Rushmore struggled with high teacher dropout rates, this department worked hard to mentor new teachers into the department with hopes that they would stay at the school for several years. During interviews, Gina consistently contributed her knowledge about instructional practices to these mentors whom she continued to work with throughout her

teaching career. To continue to learn about the profession, Gina is involved in several groups that facilitated her growth as a teacher. For example, she is a member of a Teacher Research group at the local university and participated in The National Writing Project Site at the university nearby. It is important to note that Gina was young and did not have a family at this time, which may have contributed to her ability to be involved in a variety after-school groups.

I wanted to work with Gina because of her strong beliefs in empowerment and agency, which I learned about in preliminary meetings and classroom observation before the study began. Gina wanted to not only help prepare students to be readers, writers, and researchers, but also to help them make sense of themselves and the world around them. Similar to critical pedagogy, Gina believed that students should learn to question ideologies and practices that they consider to be oppressive and attempt to take action against those oppressions within their local contexts (Freire, 2001; Shor, 1992). In an interview with Gina, she explained that many of her students felt like their life paths had already been determined.

Gina: They are forming their identities as we speak. I think that it is such a good age to bring it up. By the time I get them in junior year, some of them feel like it's done, that their life is chosen for them=

Vetter: =Yeah=

Gina: =It's constantly evolving and it's not over yet. Its not decided. You don't have to do this, work construction, you know what I mean? A lot of students at our school feel pigeon-holed. Like David in one of my classes always writes about how everyone thinks he's going to be a construction worker. He's brilliant. They see who he is and they see what his dad does and that is what you

> are doing. Raul used to talk about that too. It's important to help them understand that you are still in control (Transcribed interview, 5.29.06).

Here, Gina stated that she hoped to help students recognize their agency in and outside of school. She modeled what an "agent of change" looks like by actively creating much needed spaces for students within the school. In an interview, she explained how she made changes within the school community:

> Vetter: One of your goals is to empower students. When did you get to that point and what made you reach that point?
>
> Gina: The actual empowerment, probably last year. Because I think that I was so focused on myself for the first two years that just last year I started focusing less on myself and more on them. And I started realizing all of the things that they didn't have that the other kids at other schools have. And so it began with the creative writing class. Because I was like, other schools have a creative writing elective, why don't we? What else do they not have that other kids have? (Transcribed interview, 5.29.06)

Along with the creative writing class, Gina started the school's literary anthology. She also works with the SPURS program and is co-sponsor of the school's poetry slam club. Therefore, her facilitation of identity exploration permeates several aspects of her teaching in and outside of the classroom. Although identity work occurred in several of Gina's worlds, this study focused on how she facilitated it in one English III classroom.

The Students

> What can be done with thousands of children but count them? In mass, children—and the challenges they present—are faceless, nameless, and overwhelming. But these massive numbers of children are not isolated individuals; they're social participants included, or so we hope, in particular classrooms and schools in particular institutions and communities.
>
> (Dyson, 1995, p. 51)

I focused on students in one seventh-period fifty-minute English III class to observe how their identities shaped and were shaped by literacy practices within opportunities for identity exploration. The class consisted of twenty-five students, with 16 Latino/as and 9 African Americans, as Table 1.1 indicates. I sent permission forms home to each students' parents/caretakers and did not focus on students who did not return their permission forms. Pseudonyms were used to protect the students, teacher, and school, and all data were kept in a secure location. If students did not want to be in the study, their contributions to classroom discussions were not analyzed, and they were not part of the focus group interviews. If they were video-taped, their contributions were not shown or used in written publications or conferences. Fifteen students agreed to participate in the study.

Table 1.1: Student Demographic Information.

Race	**Female**	**Male**	**Total**
African American	6	3	9
Latino/ass	7	9	16
Total	13	12	25

After six weeks of observations, I chose eight focal students. Table 1.2 provides a description of these students. These eight students were chosen for their representation of the classroom population, participation in opportunities for identity exploration, and attendance. I chose focal students because I needed to focus my attention on a small group that represented the population of the classroom. I interviewed these students in

focus groups of two and/or three, took detailed notes about their classroom interactions and literacy practices, and recorded their interactions on audio or videotapes. In addition, during interviews with Gina, I focused some questions on the interactions, participation, and engagement of these particular students.

Table 1.2: Focal Students.

Name	**Gender**	**Self-identified Ethnicity**	**Typical literacy practices and classroom interactions**
Shane	Male	African American	Shane entered the classroom with an IEP for his reading and writing disability. He typically engaged in literacy practices, but usually grew frustrated. Shane liked to have individual support from Gina and often worked with June.
Carole	Female	African American	Carole inconsistently engaged in literacy practices during class. During discussions, Carole was typically part of the classroom conversation. However, when engaged in silent, individual work, Carole had more difficulty. She enjoyed reading and engaged in the multigenre research project.
Stacey	Female	African American and Puerto Rican	Stacey was typically engaged in all literacy practices in the classroom. She rarely resisted any assignment and always turned in her work. Stacey distracted others with her humorous interactions.
June	Female	African American	June entered Gina's classroom with an IEP for reading and writing disabilities. Her engagement in literacy practices was inconsistent. She typically resisted when she did not find the assignment meaningful and relevant to her life.
Lucy	Female	Latina	Lucy was an English Language Learner. She typically completed all of her assignments and worked hard to become fluent in English. Lucy was quiet and reluctant to speak in front of the whole class.
Freddy	Male	Latino	Freddy entered Gina's classroom with advanced skills in reading and writing. He resisted assignments that he was not interested in, but he always completed them because he cared about his grades. Freddy was one of the classroom comedians.
Omar	Male	Latino	Omar was bilingual in Spanish and English. He was

			interested in reading and writing non-fiction. Omar typically engaged in literacy practices in the classroom, but did not usually do work outside of the classroom because it was not accepted by his social world.
Daryle	Male	African American	Daryle entered Gina's classroom as a student who had formally skipped class and been in trouble with the administration. When given an assignment, Daryle was extremely focused and completed it quickly. When finished, Daryle did not know what to do with his free time. His goal for the semester was to attend class and do well in those classes.

At the end of March, three participants from these focal students were chosen in order to develop in-depth case studies of the relationship between their identities and literacy practices. These three students, June, Freddy, and Lucy, were chosen for four reasons. First, I chose to highlight these three students because I noticed that they positioned themselves in different ways when they were given the opportunity to explore their identities within literacy events. Second, the students were representative of the classroom's population. Third, they attended school regularly, thus I was able to observe and document the their literacy practices. Attendance was an issue that sometimes made it difficult to build relationships with students and observe their literacy practices. Third, I built relationships with these students through focal group interviews and informal individual interviews. In these interviews, I was able to make more sense out of the ways in which their identities shaped their literacy practices and vice versa. I also spoke with them frequently in informal conversations. Below I briefly describe the three students – June, Freddy, and Lucy.

June: "Try, Try Harder."

June is an African American high school junior who joined Gina's classroom during the middle of the fall semester. She has short hair and typically wore jeans, t-shirts, and a bulky jacket. June is from a working-class background and attended several schools before she came to Rushmore. When she entered Gina's classroom, she found that she knew several of her classmates from elementary and middle school. In addition, June came to Rushmore with a Special Education Individualized Education Program that addressed issues related to her reading and writing skills. I chose June as a case study because she consistently positioned herself as a resistant student except during those literacy events that offered her opportunities to explore her identities. In addition, June attended school regularly, shared her opinions in a focus group interview, and spoke with me in several informal interviews. We developed a trusting relationship in which June talked to me about the ways in which her exploration of sexual orientation shaped her literacy practices and vice versa. After asking June what she learned from Gina's class in an informal interview, she stated, "Don't give up if you don't understand what is going on. …Try, try harder." Not giving up and learning to try harder became a consistent theme for June in Gina's classroom.

Freddy: "I Believe in Sacrifice."

Freddy is a Latino student who came to Rushmore in his junior year to participate in the academy for Auto-Tech. He is from a middle-class background and typically rode his bike to and from school. Freddy had various hairstyles throughout the semester and usually wore shorts and t-shirts to school. His knees were typically bandaged from the

frequent falls caused by his BMX bike tricks. Freddy was a smart student, but he had a hard time sitting still and worked best in an environment where he could work with his hands. In addition, because he moved from another school, he came to Rushmore with different social identities that students at Rushmore were hesitant to accept. Despite those issues, Freddy explained in an essay that he believed in "making sacrifices to benefits one's self." I chose to work with Freddy because he recently transferred to Rushmore and offered another perspective into the school's culture. Freddy was not afraid to "be himself" in a space that did not always accept his behaviors. Freddy and I built a relationship by chatting throughout the semester about his interests in biking, music, and computers. Through observations and analysis, I noticed that Freddy not only learned about himself and the world around him through opportunities for identity exploration, but he was also able to transform the structure of literacy events to fit his needs and interests.

Lucy: "I Overcame my Fears."

Lucy is a Latina student who moved to the United States from Mexico when she was in middle school. She plays soccer and typically made A's and B's in Gina's classroom. She has long, dark hair and usually wore jeans and shirts. Lucy struggled most with being a second language learner. However, by the time she entered Gina's room, she had an advanced mastery of the English language. In an essay about starting school in the United States, Lucy stated that, "although it was difficult because of the language, I realized that middle school was not as awful as I thought… When I started high school, I felt more confident in myself." I wanted to work with Lucy because she

was an English Language Learner who worked hard to be a successful student in Gina's classroom, while at the same time maintaining her identity as Latina. Lucy chose not to participate in an oral interview, so she completed a written interview about classroom practices. Although Lucy was not comfortable in front of the camera, I regularly observed her and spoke with her without audio or video recordings. In addition, I noticed that Lucy engaged in opportunities for identity exploration; however, Lucy resisted certain literacy practices that asked her to make her private life public.

Field Entry

I was first introduced to Gina by Dr. Fairbanks in her National Writing Project Teacher Research Group. In an initial meeting, Gina and I discovered that we had similar interests, and she invited me to observe a few of her classes. After observing the first class, Gina and I further discussed my research goals and decided that her classroom would be a good fit. From there, I submitted research proposals and permission forms to the school district and the International Review Board. I communicated with the principal, and he granted permission for me to conduct the study in the high school. Following the principal's consent, I received permission from the district. In January, I received permission from IRB to begin collecting data.

Once permission from the teacher, district and IRB was acquired, I sought permission from the students and parents. All of the students in Gina's classroom were asked to participate in the study. Permission forms were written in both English and Spanish. Students were asked to make up their own pseudonym. If students were 18 or older, they were allowed to sign their own permission form. Before giving them the

permission forms, I spoke with the whole class about the research goals and questions. I explained that I wanted to listen, watch, and learn from them and their experiences in Gina's classroom. The letter gave permission for the students to be audio and videotaped and for written artifacts to be collected. Students and parents were aware that their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time, that data were to be kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identity. Fifteen students agreed to participate.

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES/SOURCES

In this section, I describe my data collection techniques and sources, such as participant observations, field notes, audio and video recorded, formal and informal interviews, and artifacts. Table 1.3 details my data collection procedures over the five months of the study. I elaborate on the procedures in the sections below.

Table 1.3: Data Collection Procedures.

Date	**Data collection**
January	▪ Familiarized self with classroom and students ▪ Informal observations began
February	▪ Formal data collection began ▪ Formal observations began, audio and videotaping in English III classroom 3-5 times per week. ▪ Collected assignments ▪ Photocopied volunteered student work ▪ Chose eight focal students (Shane, Carole, Stacey, June, Lucy, Freddy, Omar, and Daryle). ▪ Conducted first formal interview with Gina
March	▪ Continued formal data collection ▪ Formal observations continued, audio and videotaping in same classroom 3-5 times per week. ▪ Collected assignments ▪ Photocopied volunteered student work ▪ Began formal group interviews with students during lunch

	▪ Chose three case studies (June, Freddy, and Lucy).
April	▪ Continued formal data collection ▪ Formal observations continued, audio and videotaping in same classroom 3-5 times per week. ▪ Collected assignments ▪ Photocopied volunteered student work ▪ Finished formal group interviews with students during lunch ▪ Conducted second formal interview with Gina
May	▪ Continued formal data collection ▪ Formal observations continued, audio and videotaping in same classroom 3-5 times per week. ▪ Collected assignments ▪ Photocopied volunteered student work ▪ Conducted informal interviews with students on last day ▪ Conducted final interview with Gina

Participant Observations

Beginning in January 2006 until May 2006, I observed and sometimes participated in the on-level English III classroom events. To become familiar with the classroom norms and practices, I observed activities, such as whole-class discussion, small-group writing workshop, library research, and individualized reading for at least three days each week. These observations were used to identify initial patterns of Gina's instructional practices and instructional talk, along with the students' typical literacy practices.

As a participant-observer, I typically sat in a chair at the back of the classroom next to the computers and Gina's desk. I behaved more like an observer at first, taking notes of student and teacher behavior. As the semester progressed, I developed relationships with students, some stronger than others, and spoke with them before, during, and after class. These conversations were mostly about their interests, hobbies,

and school. On some occasions, I helped students as they worked in small groups and answered questions about how to spell or define a word. Throughout the semester, I shifted in and out of researcher, teacher, and class member roles (Bettie, 2003; Roman, 1993).

On two occasions, I discovered that students did not view me as an authority or disciplinarian figure. First, Gina suddenly had to leave the room when a journalist from National Public Radio came to interview her about her students' *This I Believe* papers. Students were taking a reading diagnostic test, and Gina asked me to watch over the students while they took the test. When Gina left, students did not remain silent. After students finished the test, I asked to pick them up and the following dialogue occurred:

Vetter: When you are done just give them to me.

Carole: No, you' re not the teacher.

June: Car*ole*.

Carole: I'm just playin'. She didn't hear me (Transcribed video, 4.15.06).

Second, when Shane and Freddy joked with Gina about turning in a blank assignment, Shane told Gina that she "had no laugh bones." Shane then turned to me and said he knew that I had some. At that point I realized that, unlike a teacher, I had the luxury of sitting back and laughing at their jokes, while Gina had to get them to focus on the daily agenda. These perspectives of me as a non-authority may have helped students view me as approachable.

Field Notes

Because this study took an ethnographic approach, I took detailed notes about students' participation and the teacher's facilitation of various literacy events so that a holistic description was provided (Mertens, 1997; Rossman and Rallis, 2003). When I first entered the classroom, I typed notes on my laptop about the physical description of the room and the daily agenda. When class began, I typed observations and talk that occurred throughout the class that day. After these observations, I expanded these notes by watching or listening to the audio-video recording that evening basing the expansion on four kinds of notes that are explained in Table 1.4: field notes (FN), theoretical notes (TN), methodological notes (MN), and personal notes (PN) (Corsaro, 1981; Hubbard & Power, 1999) (See Appendix A for example field notes).

Table 1.4: Types of field notes.

Field Notes	A running account of what happens or transcriptions of video or audio recordings.
Personal Notes	Any information relevant to the class or state of mind. Personal reactions, how you feel, self-reflection, memories, and impressions.
Methodological Notes	Questions or statements about how the work is being done. Description of methods used, reasons for using those methods, ideas for possible changes in methodology.
Theoretical Notes	Hunches about patterns or why events are occurring as they are. Emergent trends, hypotheses.

(Corsaro, 1981; Hubbard & Power, 1999)

Audio and Video Recording

Audio recording began in early February. I started with an audio digital recorder to ease students into the recording process. I typically placed the audio recorder with a flat microphone in the center of the room when whole-class discussion occurred. Later, I

placed it in the center of students' small tables to learn more about my focal students. Students were typically excited when their groups were recorded and asked me what I thought about their conversations the next day.

I began videotaping in late February and transcribed and analyzed pertinent episodes in those recordings. At first, I transcribed literacy events in which opportunities for identity exploration were provided. As the study progressed and after the three case study students were chosen, I transcribed all literacy events in which the three students were involved. The videotapes provided information about both verbal and nonverbal patterns of interaction. The nonverbal interactions became especially important when assessing the ways in which students' identities shaped their literacy practices. In addition, it provided insight into nonverbal norms of the classroom that facilitated opportunities for identity exploration. Notes about nonverbal communication were recorded during initial observations and then expanded after watching and reviewing videotapes. At first, students were intimidated by the video recorder and made humorous comments to the camera. As the semester progressed, most students did not notice the taping. However, some students continued to ask me if I was videotaping them and a few students preferred not to be the focus of the videotapes.

Formal and Informal Interviews

I formally interviewed the teacher three times throughout the five months (see Appendix B for interview questions). In the initial interview, which was audio-taped and later transcribed, I asked her about her pedagogical strategies and theories, curriculum design, relationship with students, and her thoughts on students' participation and

engagement in the classroom. During the second interview (videotaped), I talked with Gina about her interpretations of the data collected so far, what practices and norms she used to facilitate identity exploration, and her thoughts on the literacy practices of particular students. In addition, we discussed a few potential patterns found through initial analysis and talked about the videotape that I showed students in their interview pertaining to humor in the classroom. In the final interview, which was audio-taped, we addressed a summary of data analysis from written analytic memos and her overall experience as a participant in this research study. These interviews started with open-ended questions, which evolved into conversations, because of our mutual interests in education. At the end of the interviews, I asked her if she had any questions for me about the research.

I interviewed the students in focus groups, which were formed based on my initial data collection (Spradley, 1979) (see Appendix C for interview questions). Feminist research encourages researchers to minimize the power dynamics of the interview so that participants are better able to voice their interpretations and opinions (Eckert, 1989; Eder, 1995). I did this by organizing the interviews into groups so that the students felt more relaxed with their peers and by outnumbering me as an adult. However, because not all students attended the interviews, three students were interviewed alone. Because I had established relationships with these students by talking to them informally, I believe they felt comfortable with an individual interview. I also believe there were benefits to interviewing them alone. First, because Freddy was considered to be an "outcast," I do not believe that he would have talked about his experiences as a new student in the same

way if he would have been in a group. Shane and I also developed a trusting relationship by chatting informally everyday. Originally Shane was in the focus group with Carole and Stacey. After learning more about the dynamics of their relationship, I believe that Shane would have responded differently about the issues of race present in the video-taped discussion. I had a few students who did not want to be interviewed because they did not feel comfortable speaking English in the video or audio recording. As an alternative, the students agreed to complete a written interview in English.

Like the interview with Gina, I structured the student interviews so that my initial questions might spur a longer discussion between adolescents. I did so by asking open-ended questions that provided more opportunities for students to bring in their own perspective and collaborate with each other (Eder, 1995). The overall topic of the focus-group interviews concentrated on questions about particular literacy practices and events, opinions about classroom discussions, and their school. To portray multiple voices, I have included excerpts of their transcripts throughout the dissertation. In addition, I interviewed students around a videotape of a classroom event concerning issues of humor. As they viewed this excerpt, students provided input about their perspectives on the event.

Artifacts

I collected writing from students and notes and reflections from the teacher. For example, artifacts collected included student essays, student journals, and handouts. I also collected any notes or reflections that Gina made about the classroom transcripts/notes. This "material culture" offered data that either added to or contradicted

data that I collected from observations or interviews (Rossman and Rallis, 2003). These artifacts were copied and returned to the students immediately. None of the classroom artifacts were produced just for me.

Literacy Activities

During data collection, I was present for five major literacy activities that occurred in the classroom. I describe these activities below to provide context regarding the literacy practices that occurred throughout the semester.

This I Believe *Essay*

When I began data collection in January, students were writing *This I Believe* essays based on the essays designed by National Public Radio (NPR) and read by people across the country. The essays were typically aired during three-minute segments on *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*. The project encouraged educators to facilitate the writing of these essays in their classroom and supported the submission of the essays by young adults to their local radio stations. Several essays written by adolescents across the state were chosen to be read aloud on the radio station. Gina began this unit by asking students to make a list of their beliefs. As they brainstormed and wrote short freewrites about a few of these beliefs, they also listened to essays written by both adolescent and adult authors. After reading examples, they talked about the style of these reflective essays. Students eventually chose one belief and wrote a two- to three-page paper on that belief. Students went through the writing process, including peer editing and revision. Students also had the option to read their essay aloud for a community reading in the library and/or submit their essay to NPR.

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)

Because Rushmore High School was a low-performing school, it was important for students to be prepared for passing the TAKS test, which was taken in February. Some of this preparation occurred in the form of daily warm-ups about grammar. Other preparation occurred by reviewing and discussing past tests. However, Gina did not typically ask her students to practice taking the test. Instead, she integrated the assessed knowledge and skills into units throughout the semester. For example, Gina connected the *This I Believe* essay to the reflective writing on the test. To help students feel less anxious about the unknown essay question, they played "prompt roulette" in which students chose a prompt, written by another student from a bowl and outlined a potential reflective essay.

Independent Reading

Another literacy activity that occurred in Gina's classroom was independent reading. Gina gave students a variety of books to choose from, including *The Color of Water* by James McBride*, Always Running* by Luis J. Rodriguez*, The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, *Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, and *Bless Me Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya (see Appendix D for book summaries). After students chose a book, they were expected to create their own reading schedule for the six weeks. For this independent reading students completed dialectic journals and created an individual project, which allowed students to illustrate their knowledge of the book through a creative product, such as a cartoon.

When choosing books for her classes, Gina typically chose the "highest interest books" or books that students could relate to. She realized that when students said, "I don't like to read" it was because they had not found a book that interested them. Thus, Gina brought out a range of books for students to read, some of which were classic and some contemporary. In Gina's department, teachers were able to request books that they wanted to teach, which were generally approved and ordered by their department chair.

Multigenre Research Project

Students in Gina's classroom completed a multigenre research project in which they researched a topic of their choice and wrote about the issue in several different genres (Romano, 1995). Students collected information in the public library for five days and then wrote their research in various genres. At the beginning of the project, students and teacher learned about various genres and brainstormed topics. Although the multigenre research assignment originally required students to include five genres, the requirements changed because of time constraints. Instead, students organized their research and created their project in fewer genres.

Reading Fallen Angels

At the end of the semester, students read *Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Meyers as a whole class. Students read the book in a variety of ways, such as a whole-class reading or individual reading at home. Gina facilitated discussions about the book and required that students keep a dialectic journal about the characters. Students learned about the Vietnam War through group research projects and from former Vietnam veterans who

came to speak to their class. As a final assessment, students were expected to write an essay about the book on their final exam.

In a follow-up interview, Gina said that she chose to teach *Fallen Angels* because she wanted to make connections to what students were learning in their history classes. Gina felt that because the story was told from an African American soldier's perspective, it would broaden students' understanding of the war. She also believed that the book might provide opportunities for students to make sense out of the current war in Iraq.

DATA ANALYSIS

Constant-Comparative Method

Framed within grounded theory, the constant-comparative method studies the social processes of people in order to better understand human behavior and experience (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The method requires that researchers constantly compare newly gathered data with previously collected data in order to refine categories. For this study, I used the constant-comparative method to generate common patterns and themes across student and teacher interactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To begin analysis, I reviewed all audio and videotapes and extended field notes that corresponded with those recordings. Extended notes included information about nonverbal behavior, detailed dialogue, and personal, methodological, and theoretical notes. After notes were extended, I read and reread all of the data (field notes, transcribed interviews, my journals, and artifacts) and identified literacy events in which opportunities for identity exploration seemed to occur. While reviewing notes, I wrote comments in the margins based on the following questions: (a) what are the typical characteristics of this

classroom?; (b) how is this identity work being facilitated by the teacher?; and (c) how are students exploring identities through this literacy event? Example margin notes for these questions included "writing workshop was frequently in progress," or "teacher shared reflective writing about her goal to empower students," or "student examined sexuality through reflective writing." Based on these notes, I organized data into three categories: (a) the figured world of the classroom (i.e. typical characteristics of the classroom); (b) facilitation of identity work by teacher; and (c) identity exploration within literacy events.

I returned to the data several times to make sure that I included all relevant data, excluded data that did not apply, and combined data into specific categories. To refine my analysis, I created charts (Table 1.5) with defined categories, example data, and notes that commented on how this data helped me answer my research questions. To flesh out the categories, I cut up sections of the charts and created stacks of data based on categories and patterns. To answer my research question about teacher facilitation of identity exploration, I organized the themes into two categories: instructional practices and instructional talk. Themes within those categories were refined to the following: (a) connection of classroom literacy practices to the everyday lives and literacies of students, (b) encouragement of multiple perspectives and viewpoints, (c) engagement in the investigation of sociopolitical issues, and (d) development of student agency. During refinement of the themes, I wrote summaries describing each theme in analytic memos. I gave these memos to Gina, who wrote comments in the margins and returned them to me.

We discussed these memos in the last two interviews. I also incorporated questions about these themes in formal and informal student interviews.

Table 1.5: Example of Data Analysis

Theme	**Data**	**Notes**
Connection of classroom literacy practices to the everyday lives and literacies of students	Vetter: What are you learning? Carole: About miscarriages and childbirth. Vetter: Okay, so what about it. Tell me a little bit about miscarriage stuff and birth stuff. Carole: I found out I was 16 weeks when I miscarried. Vetter: Really, so what does that mean? It said something about spontaneous abortion. Your body rejects it or something, like I fell.	**Instructional practice**: Gina gave students the opportunity to choose their own topic. Carole chose to do her project on miscarriages because she recently had one. This is an example of **identity** work because Carole is able to make sense out of something that has happened in her life. It is relevant and meaningful to her life in and outside of school. Carole's **literacy practices**: Carole seems to be engaged in this assignment. She is reading and struggling to comprehend what the book says about miscarriages.
Encouragement of multiple perspectives	Gina: Yeah, you know what, instead of reading another one let's have this conversation that we had in one of my classes. We had a conversation about whether you were born a good writer or not. What do you think? Carole: Some people are and some people aren't. Some people have to learn how to do it. Stacey: No, I believe that everyone can write reflectively about something that happened, depending on what happened to you. Shane: If you put your mind to it, you can do anything.	**Instructional talk:** Gina used open-ended questions to promote conversations incorporating student opinions. This is an example of **identity** work because Carole, Stacey, and Shane explored how they would define a "good" writer. This definition may potentially influence how they position themselves in the future as writers, thus shaping students' **literacy practices**.
Focus on sociopolitical issues	Oscar: It's like a big mountain and they keep sugar coating it, sugar coating more until we find out what the truth is under that	**Instructional practice:** Gina asked students to choose their own topics for research. As a result, many students focused on sociopolitical

	mountain. We will find out it was right in front of you the whole time. You were too stupid to hear other people. It was right in front of you. If you would just open your eyes then oh you realize, if I would have paid attention, listened, but I guess other people are worried about what other people think, so what they think.	issues. Oscar researched reasons why the United States declared war on Iraq. In this literacy event, Oscar explored his **identity** as a researcher and critical reader by reading various perspectives about the war and forming an informed opinion. Oscar questioned assumptions about current media's reports about the war, thus shaping his **literacy practices.**
Development of students' agency	"Let's talk about this." "What did we find out about this?"	**Instructional talk:** Gina used inclusive talk to try and create a space in which students contributed to the content and structure of their education. Through the use of this talk, Gina positioned students as part of the figured world of the classroom. By valuing students' needs, she worked to create a space in which students were able to explore their **identities** and position themselves in new ways. This inclusive language also worked to provide spaces for students to transform **literacy practices** to fit their needs and interests.

Next, I sketched out the typical literacy practices of the eight focus students to answer my research question about the relationship between students' identities and literacy practices. While going through all data related to each student, I compared the literacy practices of students during moments of identity work to events when opportunities for identity work were not provided in order to identify if students positioned themselves in new ways. Before further analysis, I narrowed my focus to three students (June, Freddy, and Lucy). I reviewed their data and organized it into three categories based on

McCarthey's (2002) characteristics of interactions with classroom expectations and norms: appropriation, resistance, and/or transformation. For example, I noted if students appropriated or "fulfilled assignments and conformed to the rules and roles designed by the teacher and peers" (p. 29). As illustrated in Table 1.6, I documented that Lucy appropriated the expectations of the *This I Believe* essay by following Gina's guidelines. I also recorded if students resisted the curriculum, assignments, or teacher expectations in the classroom. For example, I noted how June resisted the reading of *Fallen Angels* because, as she suggested, the topic was boring. Finally, I noticed if students transformed assignments and goals by changing them to fit their own needs and interests. As noted in the table, Freddy, along with other classmates, transformed the structure of a classroom reading into a reader's theater. After I documented these literacy practices, I examined how students' identities shaped and were shaped by their literacy practices. Discourse analysis was used to further refine that analysis. Analytic memos were written that charted the literacy practices of these students and findings were checked with students and teacher formally and informally.

Table 1.6: Characteristics of Literacy Practices

Student	**Literacy event**	**Data**	**Interactions with norms and expectations of the classroom**
Lucy	*This I Believe* essay	365 days lost, for what, all because of a fear of starting over. I was furious with my parents because they didn't let me graduate with all of my friends in Mexico. I chose to take care of my little sister instead of going to middle	***Appropriation:*** Lucy followed all expectations and guidelines that Gina developed for this assignment. Gina used her essay as a model essay for reflective writing.

		school. But now I realize that it was my fear that did not let me start school in the year 2000.	
June	Reading of war letters from Vietnam. Students were asked to make connections to Fallen Angels.	I don't like this war crap. This is boring.	***Resistance***: June seemed to resist because she thought that the topic is boring.
Freddy	Whole-class reading of *Fallen Angels*.	Freddy: *You've got to be out of your mind* [he said in the voice of the character].	***Transformation:*** Freddy seemed to spontaneously transform, along with his classmates, this literacy event into a reader's theater rather than a whole-class read aloud.

Discourse Analysis

To begin the microanalysis of data, I transcribed all video and audiotapes that pertained to the three cases – June, Freddy, and Lucy. Conventions for these transcripts are described in Figure 1. The purpose of these transcriptions was to better understand the relationship between students' identities and literacy practices across time.

Figure 1: Conventions Used in the Presentation of Transcripts

[]	Indicates contextual and nonverbal information [laughs, points, etc.].
( )	Indicates unintelligible utterance.
(.)	Indicates a short silence of pause.
CAPITAL	Indicate a louder voice relative to adjacent talk.
okay	Indicates a softer voice.

Gina: [It's been Vetter: [Okay	Indicates the point at which speech overlaps.
Gina: It's been= Vetter: =Okay	Indicates no pause between speakers' lines
Oka::y	Indicates a lengthening of the preceding vowel sound
Yester*day*	Indicates stress on italicized syllable
E x a c t l y	Indicates word said in slower, emphatic fashion

In order to understand why students shifted in and out of appropriation, resistance, and transformation of literacy practices, I engaged in discourse analysis focusing on students' positionality (See Appendix E for example of analysis). Davies & Harré (1990) described two ways in which "selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines" (p. 91). The first, described as interactive positioning, occurs when one person positions another. The second is reflexive positioning in which one positions oneself. Although these positionings are not always intentional, they provide insight into how people conceive themselves and others. In other words, they are "fragments of an autobiography" (p. 91). In transcripts where June, Freddy, and Lucy were integral parts of the literacy events, I charted the ways in which they positioned themselves and others and were positioned by others in order to better understand their situational identities within that particular situation. I also examined how Gina positioned herself and her students within the classroom space. For example, after students made a derogatory comment about a biracial character in *The Color of Water*, Gina stated, "Ya'll if you can't respect my

classroom I don't need you in here." During analysis, I noted that Gina positioned the students who made the derogatory comments as disrespectful. She positioned herself as the authority of the classroom ("my classroom") who expected respectful behavior, especially when it came to issues of race. I interpreted this comment to be one way that Gina worked to shape a space in which students respected each other's differences regardless of the racial tensions that existed outside of the classroom. After Gina's comment, students immediately shifted their behavior and positioned themselves as respectful students. This shift in positioning may indicate students respect for Gina and/or the classroom space.

To gain more insight into *why* students and Gina positioned themselves and others in particular ways, I drew from Gee's (2005) three categories of analysis: situated meanings, social languages, and Discourse models. Drawing from Van Sluy's et al. (2006) use of Gee's techniques, I asked the questions presented in Table 1.7 to analyze the talk and text of the students in Gina's classroom.

Table 1.7: Questions for Critical Discourse Analysis

Situated Meaning	▪ What are the key words or phrases in the text? ▪ What do particular words mean in this context? ▪ What do these words mean in this time and place?
Social Languages	▪ What is the grammar and function of the language? ▪ What type of person speaks like this? ▪ Is the grammar appropriate for the setting?
Discourse Models	▪ What are the speaker's underlying assumptions and beliefs? ▪ What are the simplified storylines that one must assume for this to make sense? ▪ What Discoursemodels does the speaker believe?
Situated Identities	▪ Who is the speaker trying to be and what is she or he trying to do? ▪ What Discourses are being produced here?

Each of these categories provided insight into the situated identities of students. Specifically, the examination of situated meanings is significant to understanding the meanings of words depending on the context and situation of the talk or text. For example, June and Stacey engaged in conversation about June's frustration about writing an outline for a practice TAKS prompt. After June admitted that she was frustrated, Stacey "joked around" with June about that frustration through several comments, including the following: "Are you feeling discouraged girl/boy?" In my analysis of this sentence, I examined the situated meaning of "discouraged" and "girl/boy." Because June entered the classroom with reading and writing difficulties, June often felt discouraged in assignments. From past interactions, I understood that Stacey knew about June's difficulties with those literacies. Thus, I inferred that "discouraged" was a reference to June's frequent frustrations with reading and writing. The use of the phrase "girl/boy" was used in reference to June's sexuality, who self-identified as a lesbian. These situated meanings helped me to understand that Stacey may have used these particular words within this context to in order to "make fun" of June's reading/writing difficulties and homosexuality.

The investigation of social languages provided insight into those situated meanings by asking what types of language June and Stacey used in particular situations. A social language is a particular style or variety of language used for a particular purpose (Gee, 2005). For example, by examining the same sentence, I inferred that Stacey was using informal language by using "girl/boy," a phrase not typically used in formal or academic settings. In addition, I interpreted this interaction to be similar to what Smitherman

(1977) termed signification based on past conversations and information from interviews. Stacey suggested that she used "ritual insults" as a typical interaction with friends. This analysis provided more insight into how Stacey positioned herself and June. Perhaps through signification, Stacey positioned June and herself as a friend who typically engaged in this type of playful interaction.

I considered the cultural or Discourse models of students in order to better understand the various storylines that students used in talk or text in order to make sense in the world. Gee (1996) explains that cultural models are "simplified worlds" in which we "make our choices and guesses about meaning in relation to these worlds" (p. 78). He later used the terms Discourse models instead of cultural models, suggesting that the term cultural was problematic because "not everyone who shares a given model" is of the same culture (p. 61). Cultural or Discourse models are "generalizations from past experience that people make" and are "representations of self at a particular time that people try to reassert, even under new conditions" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 55). By examining Discourse models, I was able to better understand the assumptions that students made about particular talk and text. These assumptions helped me to better understand their multiple identities and the ways those identities were enacted in the classroom. For example, from the above statement Stacey's seemed to assume that these ritual insults were a way to build relationships with her friends. This cultural or Discourse model may be related to her identity as African American.

Through this analysis, I was better able to understand that Stacey situated herself as one who used ritual insults to perform her friendships. This positioning shaped her

practices by enabling her to enact her social and academic identities, sometimes simultaneously, within the figured world of the classroom. Stacey's signifying also shaped June's literacy practices by distracting her from literacy events.

I used the interpretation from this analysis to guide and inform themes about the relationship between students' identities and literacy practices for the three case studies. Following discourse analysis, I complied detailed descriptions of the ways in which students' literacy practices shaped and were shaped by their identities.

Trustworthiness

Triangulation

Triangulation is the use of "multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, or theories" that confirm or disconfirm findings (Rossman and Rallis, 2003, p.115). In this study, I used a variety of data sources. I collected data from the students, teacher, and from my observations and field notes in the classroom. I also used several methods. I took detailed notes from observations, video/audiotaped classroom events, and interviewed students and teacher. This triangulation of sources and methods provided various perspectives, which both confirmed and contradicted particular findings and patterns.

Member Checking and Peer Debriefing

I also used participant validation or member checks so that the teacher and students elaborated, corrected, extended or argued my initial interpretations (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Gina and I informally member checked at the end of the each day. I typically asked her what she thought about a particular event and then took notes about what she

said in order to understand her perspective. More formally, I showed Gina notes and analytic memos about emerging categories at the end of data collection in order to view her perspective and gain insight. She took written notes and we talked about them in a formal interview. I provided a draft of the dissertation for Gina, along with a summary, for her to read and respond about my interpretations. During the formal interviews with the focal group students, I showed students a videotape and transcript of one literacy event. Students told me what they thought was happening in this situation. Their insights helped me make decisions about analysis.

My committee and fellow graduate students served as peer debriefers and offered various perspectives and interpretations of the data. I shared and presented data and initial analysis with a professor and graduate students in *Advanced Discourse Analysis*. In addition, I met with a group of graduate students on Fridays at a coffee shop where we talked about data analysis. Each of these debriefers had access to analytic memos, field notes, transcripts, and video/audio tapes. Two colleagues read and commented on drafted versions of the findings and analysis.

Monitored Obtrusiveness

Weekly, I reviewed field notes and commented on the obtrusiveness of my presence in the classroom. The students who sat near me in the back of the room typically noticed that I took notes on my laptop. Several students commented that I typed fast and asked if I typed everything they said. When students cursed or said something inappropriate, they usually looked back at me and apologized, having forgotten that I was writing down everything they said. When I began videotaping, some students performed

in front of them camera and others avoided it. However, as the semester progressed, students seemed to forget that the camera was on. When students said something inappropriate, a classmate might remind them that the camera was on. The video recording became more obtrusive when I informally talked with students doing research or projects. However, students were not required to talk into the camera and if requested, I shut off the camera and instead took notes on what they said. All of these instances were noted in my methodological notes and in analytic memos and were accounted for during analysis.

Limitations

> All too often in "The Morning After" Roiphe evokes a vision of feminist movement that simplisticly mirrors patriarchal stereotypes. No doubt this mirroring allows her voice, and not the voices of visionary critiques of feminist dogma, to receive widespread attention and acclaim. Roiphe closes by warning readers about the dangers of "excessive zeal" in advancing political concerns, cautioning that it can lead to blind spots, a will to exaggeration, and distortions in perspective. Regrettably, Roiphe is not guided by this insight.
>
> (bell hooks)

Researchers suggest that it is important for investigators to situate themselves historically, culturally, socially and politically so that readers grasp a better understanding of their interpretations (Bettie, 2003; Lather, 1991; McRobbie, 1981; Weiler, 2001). As Gallas (1998) said, researchers analyze the data to make *their* sense, not the students' sense. Qualitative research can be limiting because the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). It is not meant to make large-scale generalizations, but instead tell a unique story. In addition, the readers and authors need to be aware of biases that shape the interpretation of the data. In *Making*

Race Visible, Appelman (2003) looks back at work that she did with students. She suggests that transcription might offer a more multivocal study and argues that we need to develop a reflective awareness and be forthcoming and honest about how we work as a researcher.

Because this writing is from a White female middle-class perspective, it is important for me to address the issue that I am a White researcher who interpreted these case studies from a narrow lens. I am a middle-class graduate student who taught high school English literature for five years in a suburban school. When I walked into the classroom at Rushmore, I was immediately aware of my Whiteness, age, and middle-class stature. I wondered if students with ethnic and cultural backgrounds different from mine would treat me differently or not feel comfortable talking to me. In addition, I worried that my lens might keep me from analyzing the data in a way that was open to the myriad of perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds represented in the classroom. To become more comfortable with the students, I spoke with them about the study and answered any questions that they had. I emphasized that I wanted to learn about education from them in order to pass this information to future teachers. In addition, I informally talked with students about their everyday lives and offered help if I saw them struggling with an assignment. Overall, I felt that students were comfortable with my presence and did not view me as threatening. Although I transcribed data to illustrate multiple voices and invited students and teacher to engage in data analysis, my interpretation continues to be from a White, female, middle-class perspective. In addition, as I member-checked and peer debriefed, I was constantly reminded about my

blind spots and what I was not examining. I am thankful for those reminders, but cannot help but worry about other blind spots that I have not foreseen in this examination.

Another limitation of this study is that I was not able to build strong relationships with all students. At first, I was drawn to the students who were more outgoing and who made me laugh. In addition, I got to know students who talked to me before and after class about their interests and hobbies. When I chose the focal group students, I purposefully chose a few who were more quiet and introverted, such as Lucy. I noticed that several of the students who did not talk frequently in class or to me individually were English Language Learners. To build relationships, I often talked to the students at their table without audio or video recording the conversations. In addition, I gave them written interviews so they would feel more comfortable and have more time to respond.

Because I was in Gina's classroom three to five times during the week, I often worried that I was imposing. In my first few reflective journals I was concerned that Gina might feel judged or anxious with me in the room so frequently throughout the semester. As the semester progressed, I found that Gina was extremely reflective and often talked to me openly about her teaching practices. Because I collected data in both an on-level and Advanced Placement course, I frequently compared the two (the data from the English III AP class was not used in this study). I wondered why she chose to do events like Occasional Papers (a written paper about a significant occasion that is shared with the class) (Martin, 2003) and Socratic Seminars in her honors class, but not her on-level class. We talked about this issue in the last interview and Gina mentioned that she wondered that herself over the semester. During the 2006/2007 school year she

began Occasional Papers with her on-level students as well. Finally, I often worried about asking Gina to take the time to write notes on transcripts and/or collect student data. As a former teacher, I knew that her first concern was teaching her class, not collecting data or making notes for this study. However, I asked when I felt that it was necessary and happily collected what she was able to give me.

Analysis of someone's identity is difficult because identities are fluid and open to interpretation. More data from the out-of-school lives of students would have provided insightful data about the identities that students brought to the classroom and the ways in which identity work in the classroom shaped identities in their social and home worlds. In addition, interviews from parents/guardians and other family members would have painted a more detailed picture of the ways in which students performed identities and positioned themselves in and out of school. I would have also liked to follow the case studies over their four years of high school because it would have provided more details about the ways in which they authored themselves over time. Finally, because I collected data during the second semester teacher and student relationships were already formed. It would be beneficial to collect data throughout the entire year to observe and make sense out the ways in which the relationship between identity and literacy shifts as relationships develop.

Chapter Four

Creating a Space for Identity Exploration

> The greatest promise of literacy "is to offer means for students to connect what is deeply personal with what can be made deeply and meaningfully public in attempts to make and remake public spaces of dialogue and possibility – places where we can meet one another, perhaps, as friends, even as we act out in worlds and actions our own peculiar identities, obligations, and responsibilities."
>
> (Robinson, 1998, p. 5)

This study examined the ways in which opportunities for identity exploration occurred in an on-level eleventh-grade classroom taught by Gina. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed description of the figured world of Gina's classroom by presenting findings and analyses that investigate how Gina's instructional practices and instructional talk facilitated opportunities for identity exploration. I consider the classroom to be a figured world because it is a realm in which students' identities and agency are shaped dialectically and dialogically (Holland et al., 1998). Holland et al. (1998) explained how figured worlds are formed:

> The production and reproduction of figured worlds involves both abstractions of significant regularities from everyday life into expectations about how particular types of events unfold and interpretations of the everyday according to these distillations of past experiences. A figured world is formed and re-formed in relation to the everyday activities and events that ordain happenings within it. It is certainly not divorced from these happenings, but neither is it identical to the particulars of any one event. It is an abstraction, an extraction carried out under guidance (p. 53).

Thus, the classroom world had already been figured by the everyday expectations about how classroom events unfold. At the same time, because the figured world of a classroom is not necessarily identical to a classroom next door, each world is formed and

re-formed depending on the everyday happenings ordained within it. Although the shaping of such a world is dialogic and fashioned by all participants, Gina initiated the fashioning of a space that provided opportunities for identity exploration through instructional practices and talk. This chapter is dedicated to discussing how Gina shaped that space and how she positioned herself and her students within that figured world. I also consider how students positioned themselves and others within the classroom in order to better understand how students resisted, appropriated, or transformed Gina's positionings within the classroom.

In the previous chapter, I provided a thorough description of the neighborhood and school, including the tensions that students dealt with in those spaces. I return to those tensions (immigration, segregation and racism, and violence and safety) at the beginning of this chapter in order to illustrate how these larger conflicts and struggles played out in the local context of the classroom. These conflicts are part of students' identities or history (ies) in person, which shape students' literacy practices. An examination of these tensions in the classroom provides insight into reasons why students may have positioned themselves and others in particular ways.

Second, themes that emerged from data analysis are discussed through thick description and examples of raw data in order to illustrate how instructional practices and instructional talk shaped the figured world of the classroom, including opportunities for identity exploration in the classroom. This description provides context for understanding how students engaged in literacy events and the relationship between students' identities and literacy practices.

TENSIONS

In this section, I highlight tensions that the students brought with them to Gina's classroom. By tensions, I mean the conflicts that students dealt with in their home and social world. Although many of these struggles are part of broader conflicts in society, they are played out in the local context of the classroom. These tensions are part of the history (ies) in person that shape how students enact identities with the classroom space. According to Holland and Lave (2002) history (ies) in person are made of "multiply authored and positioned selves, identities, cultural forms, and local and far-reaching struggles" (p. 6). Thus, tensions that students experience in and outside of school become part of students' identities and agency. Within the classroom, these tensions shape how students enact, create, and redefine identities, including how they position themselves and others. It is important that students are able to deal with these struggles in order to examine, critique, and possibly propose changes to these conflicts within their neighborhood, school, and classroom. Below, I discuss some of the tensions that I observed in Gina's classroom, such as immigration, segregation and racism, and violence and safety. I return to the tensions described in chapter three in order to illustrate how they are played out in the local context of Gina's classroom. Within that discussion, I describe how Gina opened possibilities for students to examine and critique these conflicts through literacy practices in her classroom. These tensions are an important part of understanding the figured world of Gina's classroom because they shape how teachers and students position themselves and others. Even though a classroom may have a standard way of being, each figured world is "formed and re-formed in relation to the

everyday activities and events that ordain happenings within it" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 53). Conflicts shape everyday activities and events; thus it is important to examine those tensions within Gina's classroom.

Immigration

Based on a three-year ethnographic study in an urban high school, Valenzuela (1999) used the term subtractive schooling to explain two ways in which schools subtract resources from U.S. Mexican youth. First, U.S. schools frequently dismiss education grounded in Mexican culture, which is defined by caring relationships between teachers and students. Second, subtractive schooling appropriates policies and practices that separate Latino/a students from their culture and language. Thus, having a bicultural identity can mean that students struggle to negotiate sometimes contradictory identities from home and school (Gonzales, 1995). Four of Gina's students moved to the United States from Mexico – Raul, Frodo, Ana, and Lucy. Their status as immigrants shaped the ways in which they interacted in the classroom. Three of the students (Ana, Lucy, and Frodo) were struggling to master English as a second language. The three sat together at a table in Gina's classroom. Often they switched back and forth between speaking Spanish and English. All of them wanted to graduate and they worked together to complete assignments. Sitting at a separate table, Raul, a senior in Gina's English III classroom, was fluent in both English and Spanish. Raul contributed to the classroom discussions and assignments, but he did not attend school consistently. Through informal conversations, Raul expressed to me his responsibility for his family, which often took

him out of the classroom. Thus, immigrant students often struggled to negotiate identities that sometimes conflicted in their home and school worlds.

Gina provided opportunities for students to explore those tensions through literacy practices in her classroom by connecting their stories of immigration to assignments in the classroom. For example, Lucy wrote about her experience moving to the United States from Mexico in an essay. Raul researched the Mexican prison system for a research project in Gina's classroom. Gina recognized that immigration was part of the lives of her students, so she chose books that dealt with those issues, such as *Always Running* by Luis J. Rodriguez and *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck. By opening spaces for students to talk, read, and write about their home worlds, Gina positioned students as people with valuable stories and experiences that should be integrated into the figured world of the classroom.

Segregation and Racism

Segregation and racism are part of a broad social tension represented in the city and neighborhood that played out within the local context of Gina's classroom. In the past, the majority of Rushmore High School's population consisted of African American students. With the increase in the Latino/a population, the demographics of Rushmore changed to a majority of Latino/a students, which continues to shape the social dynamics of individual classrooms. For example, students in Gina's classroom typically segregated themselves according to race if she did not give them assigned seats. Through observations, I noticed that students approached cultural differences through what they called "jokes" and what researchers call signification (Smitherman, 1977). The tension of

segregation and racism played out in these verbal performances. In a formal interview with Shane, an African American student, he described an event with Raul that is representative of other events that occurred in this classroom.

Shane: He was talking to me, and=

Vetter: =Raul was?

Shane: Yeah. And, um, what did he say? He said kind of racial things, but I knew he was playing, 'cause he was like this with another student. He said something, I'm not sure what he said, I called him Mexican and I said what do you want me to call you, Hispanic? And he said, No, I'm a wetback. I said okay, wetback=

Vetter: =That's the worst of them all.

Shane: I know, but we was just playing. And he said, okay whatever nigger. And then Stacey got all mad. And Stacey was just like (.) I was trying to calm Stacey down, 'cause she was in his face. And I was like, Stacey we were just playin'. No, you don't play like that da da da. 'Cause Stacey is supposedly mixed or whatever. So she was supposedly taking up for both sides.

Vetter: Do you think it was appropriate for Raul to say that?

Shane: No, but it was a joke just between us. [Transcribed interview, 3.30.06].

In this event, both Shane and Raul called each other derogatory names related to their race. Although Shane said that they were joking, he also recognized that the conversation was not appropriate for this context. This example relates to research done about an African American mode of discourse termed "signifying," that

> refers to the verbal art of insult in which a speaker humorously puts down, talks about, needles – that is, signifies on – the listener. Sometimes signifyin (also siggin) is done to make a point, sometimes it's just done for fun (Smitherman, 1977, p. 118).

Although this type of discourse is typically associated with African Americans, I observed Raul engaging in this practice with African American classmates, such as Shane. Although Shane interpreted the interaction as a "joke," Stacey took it as a personal attack on both of her ethnicities as Latina and African American. It is unknown why Stacey made this interpretation, but it might be that she believed Raul took the "joke" too far. Perhaps Stacey did not feel comfortable with Raul using the word "nigger" because he was not African American. Or perhaps Stacey's gender shaped her reaction to the interaction, although research suggests that African American women engage in a version of signifying as well (Morgan, 1994). Interestingly, Stacey frequently engaged in this type of discourse with other classmates and did not take it personally, indicating that signifying could be one way that students segregate themselves based on ethnicity.

In a similar example, Detrek, the classroom comedian, made a controversial comment when Gina described *The Color of Water* by James McBride.

Gina: And he, they, were all mixed because he had a white Jewish Orthodox mother and his mother married a black man=

[Detrek got up and walks to the other side of the room].

Detrek: =Dang, he was a mutt.

Stacey: [Excuse you.

Raul: [He said you a ho. [To Detrek, repeating another student].

Detrek: Who said that?=

Gina: =Ya'll, if you can't respect my classroom I don't need you in here.

[Detrek sat back in his seat].

Raul: I'm sorry [Transcribed video, 3.28.06].

Although Gina frequently talked about how she understood that students used this humor as a way to relate to each other, she struggled to determine when she should allow it and when she should not. Gina wanted to build a classroom with students who respected each other. In this example, she chose to confront the issue and remind students about respect. Rex (2006) found that teachers, White and African American, often struggled to understand when it was appropriate to intervene in this type of dialogue. In a case study of an African American female teacher, Rex stated that the teacher "challenged the parameters of signifying talk" when she felt that it crossed the boundary of social play and was disrespectful to classmates' academic performance (p. 296). Although Gina was White, she understood that this discourse was part of the culture of her African American students. However, she was unsure of how all of her students interpreted the interactions and did not feel comfortable when derogatory comments related to race were used in the classroom. It is interesting to note that Stacey also took offense to Detrek's comment, "Dang, he was a mutt." As seen in the earlier example, Stacey reacted when issues of ethnicity became the center of the signifying, indicating her attention to how people were named in the classroom space. Although signifying is not meant to be taken personally, it is difficult to manage its interpretations in a classroom with students from various cultures. This discourse was alive in the classroom, and it shaped the ways in which

students interacted with each other, sometimes segregating African American students from Latino/a students.

These examples are representative of the local tensions between language practices and cultural/ethnic affiliations in the classroom. Conflicts of segregation and racism are part of the figured world of the classroom because they are part of the history (ies) in person that students bring with them. To deal with the tensions played out in signification, Gina had difficulty knowing when and how she should become involved in the interactions. Gina wanted to shape a figured world in which her students' discourses were treated as valuable, but did not want her students to be disrespectful to each other's ethnicities.

Violence and Safety

Issues of violence and safety were a part the Eastside and its schools, which played out in the local context of Gina's classroom. Although I never observed any violent activity within Gina's classroom, students often talked of fights that occurred before, after, or during school. After being asked what students worried about in their everyday lives as a journal prompt, Stacey wrote:

> I have seen when my best friend got in to a fight. I was sitting next to her and her and this other girl were yelling and screaming curse words. Then my friend got pushed and the swinging were going everywhere. I have never seen any thing like it. [Written artifact, 2.10.06]

Witnessing or engaging in a fight during school is representative of issues related to power and status within the social world of school. Sometimes students engaged in physical fights to solve problems because that was the type of behavior that was

respected in their social worlds. When I started to collect data from Gina's classroom, JJ, a student in Gina's classroom, had been suspended from school for engaging in a fight. Thus, violence sometimes took students out of the classroom, making it difficult for them to become part of the figured world of the classroom. JJ enjoyed reading, researching, and engaging in slam poetry, but had a difficult time engaging in those literacy practices outside of the classroom because those activities were not accepted in his social world; however, violence was a respected behavior.

One way Gina dealt with these tensions was by choosing books that examined these issues, such as *Always Running* by Luis J. Rodriguiz because she knew that some of her students could relate to the memoir of a Chicano youth who documented his experiences as an East Los Angeles gang member in order to steer his son away from a gang that he recently joined. Students also examined and critiqued these conflicts in reflective writing and classroom discussions.

Because students brought these issues with them when they stepped into the classroom, these tensions shaped students' literacy practices. Understanding these tensions, or the history (ies)-in-person, that students brought to the classroom, provided insight into the reasons students positioned themselves and others in particular ways within this figured world.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IDENTITY EXPLORATION IN GINA'S CLASSROOM

For this study, I used the phrase *opportunities for identity exploration* to describe events in the classroom that provided occasions for students to make sense out of themselves and the world around them through various literacy practices, such as reading,

writing, and researching. During identity work, students were provided the chance to examine their identities, such as their gender, ethnicity, or as a literacy student. These opportunities were defined by times when students were able to make connections between their home and school world, use their cultural resources to engage in literacy practices, read or write about personal experiences, and be the kind of reader or writer they were at home. Through identity exploration, Gina opened spaces for students to question, resist, and broaden assumptions about particular identities through discussion about sociopolitical issues within literature. These explorations were related to the tensions that students dealt with in and outside of the classroom. Through identity work, students had the chance to examine these tensions and imagine ways in which they might go about changing them within their local context, such as starting a school club. In addition, these occasions offered possibilities for students to examine the various ways in which they could be readers, writers, or researchers by making the structure of the classroom flexible and open to the transformation of students needs and interests. Although Gina did not use the phrase *opportunities for identity exploration*, her explicit goals for the class related to issues of agency and empowerment. Thus, Gina wanted to provide a space for her students to realize that they could shape the world around them. As a researcher, I saw opportunities for identity work as central to Gina's objectives because those occasions asked students to examine their identities through literacy practices and imagine how they might redefine themselves and the world around them in order to become "who" they wanted to become.

This chapter is dedicated to answering the first sub-question: How does Gina facilitate opportunities for identity exploration in her classroom? Because identity exploration or work entails that students explore identities through literacy practices, I looked at how Gina created a figured world that enabled students to engage in identity work. Although both Gina and her students shaped the classroom space, Gina had a vision for her classroom and engaged in particular instructional practices and talk in order to create her imagined space.

In the following section I describe the instructional practices and instructional talk that Gina used to facilitate identity exploration in her classroom. By instructional practices, I mean the components that Gina used for literacy instruction, such as guiding students through the writing process. Along with these practices, I was interested in how Gina used language to create this figured world and facilitate identity work. In particular, I examine how Gina positioned her students through the language that she used. Davies and Harré (1990) argue that language works to position people in relation to one another. Johnston (2004) states that a teacher can position themselves as the giver of knowledge and students as the receivers. A teacher's "choice of words, phrases, metaphors, and interaction sequences invokes and assumes these and other ways of being a self and of being together in the classroom" (p. 9). Thus, I pay attention to how Gina's instructional talk positioned students within the figured world of the classroom. I use examples from Gina and her students to illustrate these practices and use of language, including examples from three case studies that will be discussed in chapter five.

Through the review of field notes, video and audio tapes of classroom events, and teacher and student interviews, the following themes emerged in which Gina facilitated the: (a) connection of classroom literacy practices to the everyday lives and literacies of students, (b) encouragement of multiple perspectives and viewpoints, (c) engagement in the investigation of sociopolitical issues, and (d) development of student agency. A discussion of how these themes illustrate the ways in which opportunities for identity exploration occurred in this classroom are provided at the end of each section. Table 1.8 provides a summary of the specific instructional practices and talk that Gina used to create the figured world and facilitate identity exploration.

Table 1.8: Summary of Instructional Practices and Instructional Talk

Instructional practices	**Instructional talk**	**Specific strategies used by teacher to create a space that provided opportunities for identity exploration**
Theme: Connection of classroom literacy practices to the everyday lives and literacies of students		▪ Get to know students' backgrounds by reading students' informal and formal writing about personal experiences ▪ Share own writing with students ▪ Invite relationships with students' parents/guardians ▪ Choice in what and how students learn ▪ Choose topics/literature that are relevant to students' lives and literacies
	Theme: Connection of classroom literacy practices to the everyday lives and literacies of students	▪ Invite students to share opinions and divergent responses (e.g. "What do you think?") ▪ Ask open-ended questions that promote discussion and personal connections. ▪ Revoice and write down student contributions ▪ Share narratives of her own experiences as a reader and writer
Theme: Encouragement of multiple perspectives		▪ Independent reading of books that deal with a variety of backgrounds and experiences (Gina brought in a book selections for students) ▪ Students share experiences through writing to class

and viewpoints		and/or public audience ▪ Collaboration through reading/writing workshop ▪ Seating arrangement in tables so that students sit with people they may not know in their social circle ▪ Explore new way of being a researcher and writer through multigenre research
	Theme: Encouragement of multiple perspectives and viewpoints	▪ Ask for students' opinions (e.g. "Why do you think that?") ▪ Ask students to step in shoes of another person ▪ Supportive responses (e.g. "Those are both good points.") ▪ Reinforce students' perspectives by highlighting previous comments ▪ Elaborate on students' contributions to provide another perspective
Theme: Engagement in investigation of sociopolitical issues		▪ Read, write, and research about sociopolitical issues ▪ Provide a public and private space for these issues to be explore
	Theme: Engagement in investigation of sociopolitical issues	▪ Elicit responses about sociolpolitical issues through literature (e.g. "What does 'Uncle Tom' mean?") ▪ Elaborate on students' responses about the historical context of African Americans fighting in the Vietnam War
Theme: Development of student agency		▪ High expectations of students ▪ Choice and respect ▪ Expect students to take assignments outside of class (i.e., community reading; NPR)
	Theme: Development of student agency	▪ Naming students as readers, writers, and researchers. ▪ Inclusive language (e.g., "Let's" or "We") ▪ Eliciting responses about what it means to be a reader and writer (e.g., "What is a good writer?") ▪ Ask students to retell an event from an agentive position (e.g., "How did you write this essay?")

Connections of Classroom Literacy Practices to the Everyday Lives and Literacies of Students

Instructional Practices

Gina made connections between the classroom literacy practices and the everyday lives and literacies of her students. To make these connections, Gina made certain that students had a choice in what they learned, that topics were relevant to the lives of students, and that students were involved in the decision-making processes of the classroom. In order for Gina to make these connections between particular literacy events and their everyday lives and literacies, she first had to come to know students' lives and literacies outside of school. Gina learned about her students through the writing notebooks that they kept in her classroom. These notebooks contained responses to writing prompts that typically posed questions related to students' lives in or outside of school. Sometimes the journal topic related to texts that students were reading and other times the writing notebook served as a writing warm-up. For example, Stacey, an African American and Puerto Rican student, wrote an entry on what she worried about.

> I worry about my life and everybody in it. That constantly runs through my mind. I worry about if I made the right choices. If everything would be ok. Constant things run through my mind. [Written artifact, 3.25.06]

Gina picked up these notebooks during each six weeks and wrote general comments on sticky notes, which resembled a written conversation between teacher and student. These notebooks provided insight into the everyday experiences of her students and enabled students to write about their lives in various genres. In addition, the journals provided Gina with insight about students' history (ies)-in-person and particular conflicts that

students dealt with in and outside of class. By reading the journals and writing conversational comments, she positioned students' stories and experiences as valuable and interesting. The journal writing also gave Stacey an opportunity to position herself as a writer with valuable stories to tell.

In addition, Gina provided opportunities for students to make connections between their everyday lives and literacies through research and more formal writing assignments, such as the multigenre research project. June, an African American female, chose to write about the history of homosexuality. In an informal interview with June about her research, she explained why she chose this topic.

[June sat at a table with Shane in the library].

Vetter: So why did you choose this topic to study?

June: I wanted to know more about homosexuals since I am kind of that way or whatever=

Vetter: =Okay=

June: =And I just wanted to know=

Vetter: =Find out more information. So, what kind of information are you going to find, do you want to find?

June: Why we, why they can't get married.

Me: Oh, okay=

June: =How long has it been way back when… [Transcribed video, 3.25.06]

This project opened opportunities for June to study a subject that was relevant to her home, peer, and school worlds. Although hesitant to identify herself as a lesbian within

this context, June continued to construct her identity as a lesbian within this public space through the multigenre research. In addition, this assignment allowed her to engage in nontraditional literacies by writing her research in the form of various genres, such as a song or poem. June investigated her sexual identity through this project to gain a better understanding of what it meant to be a lesbian in our society. This practice positioned June's sexual identity as a valid topic to write about and provided opportunities for June to position herself as a writer and as a lesbian within the public space of the classroom. June was able to examine a tension in her life within a figured world that valued that tension and provided a space for her to imagine how she might deal with that conflict in the future. Later, June, along with Gina, started the first Gay-Straight Alliance at Rushmore High School to begin dealing with that conflict in her local context.

In addition, Gina developed broad writing assignments that enabled students to make connections to their lives, such as the *This I Believe* essays. Lucy, Freddy, and June, the three case study students, chose to write about their everyday lives. Lucy's essay began,

> 365 days lost, for what, all because of a fear of starting over. I was furious with my parents because they didn't let me graduate with all of my friends in Mexico. I chose to take care of my little sister instead of going to middle school. But now I realize that it was my fear that did not let me start school in the year 2000. [Written artifact, 2.17.06]

Lucy wrote about what it was like for her to move from Mexico to the United States in middle school. Freddy also wrote about "making sacrifices" in order to "benefit oneself." His sacrifice referred to transferring from McMurtry High School to Rushmore for the Auto-tech Program. In addition, June struggled through an essay about a breakup with

her girlfriend. Freddy read his essay aloud in front of a community reading in the school library. Gina read Lucy's aloud, anonymously, to the class and encouraged her to send it to NPR. In these essays, students discussed the ways in which they constructed and reshaped their identities over time throughout a meaningful event in their life in and outside of school. The three case study students dealt with larger conflicts in their essays in which they were able to examine those conflicts by putting them into words that were to be published or read in public spaces. By asking students to write about their beliefs, Gina positioned students as having valuable stories to tell. This practice helped to shape a figured world that integrated and respected the cultural and social lives of her students. In return, students were able to position themselves as writers who felt comfortable writing about their struggles as an immigrant, new student, and lesbian.

Gina also felt that offering students opportunities to engage in small and whole group discussions allowed them to make connections between students' everyday lives and literacies. In an interview, Gina shared her belief that when students were given the opportunity to discuss their opinions with each other, they began to take ownership in the classroom. In an interview, she explained this strategy.

> Gina: The more opportunity you can give them to speak, the more they feel ownership of the class. And, and, when you begin to you know subjugate them to silence, its hard because they feel like they don't own the class and they don't want to do anything and then they're bored and they fall asleep and its just a chain reaction. [Transcribed interview, 4.4.06]

For example, in the following classroom discussion, Gina asked students to describe how they would define "good" writing.

[Gina sat on a stool in front of the classroom. Students sat in their tables].

Stacey: To me, it is when I can connect with it.

Gina: Okay, how can I connect? Can I connect if they were writing, I was going somewhere to do something? So how do you connect with someone? How does the writer=

Stacey: =When you do something personal, like… [Transcribed audio, 2.14.06].

Gina's questions and Stacey's responses expanded the notion that the relationship between a writer and their audience is often based on personal connections. Thus, Gina worked to create a space that encouraged students to write about their stories and experiences in order to connect with their audience. Such a space positioned students as having valuable stories that were worth writing and possibly sharing. These kinds of conversations also challenged students to think about and take ownership of their literacy practices in and outside of the classroom. This discussion positioned students as agents who can shape themselves as the writers they want to become.

Gina also learned about students' backgrounds by being involved in several after-school activities that connected with their interests. For example, Gina worked with the sponsor of the Slam Poetry Club in which students wrote slam poetry and performed it in community locations. Gina wrote her own poetry and performed it. In doing so, she built relationships with JJ and Oscar, two Latino boys in her classroom who were involved in this poetry club. She invited relationships with students' parents, such as Detrek's, whose mother was a soldier in the war in Iraq. When she returned in late spring, Detrek brought his mother to Gina's classroom so that they could meet. Gina was

also involved in the creation of the literary anthology, an annual book of students' published work, and the Gay-Straight Alliance. Gina's participation in these school activities showed students that she was committed to providing spaces for them that made connections to their lives and interests. Students recognized this commitment, which helped her to build relationships with students, despite their different backgrounds. By building relationships with students' families, she positioned her students and their families as an integral part of the figured world of the classroom.

In a formal interview with Gina, she emphasized the importance of sharing her background with her students in order to make connections. She stated, "If I don't share, stereotypes become a barrier" [Transcribed interview, 2.20.06]. When she described the first day she taught, she talked about herself and found that students had assumptions about her as a White, blonde teacher. Gina realized that the tension of segregation and racism included assumptions that she and her students had about each other. She said that some of them assumed that she was rich and snobby. After telling her students that she was born in Colombia, lived in Loredo, and was knowledgeable about hip-hop and slam poetry, she was able to make connections with students and the gap lessened. However, she said the following in a formal interview:

> Gina: I don't try to say I have a clue. I connect to you in some ways and in some ways I'll never know. There is a balance. You don't want to say I know exactly what you are going through because I don't. I don't know what it feels like to get on the bus and someone clutches their purse. [Transcribed interview, 2.20.06]

Sharing her own stories enabled students to better understand her experiences and background. Students were more likely to share their life with Gina through reading and

writing assignments because they trusted Gina. Because Gina was White, her ethnicity also played into the local tension of segregation and racism. It is important to note that Gina did not try to create a classroom world that ignored these tensions of segregation and racism. Instead, she recognized the conflict and worked through the tension by building relationships with her students. In this way, Gina's classroom became a figured world in which students examined these issues in respectful ways.

Overall, by making connections to the lives of students, students were able to examine and sometimes critique tensions in their lives and possible imagine how they might redefine identities and reshape the world around them. Through this practice, Gina positioned her students as having valuable stories and lives that were integrated into the literacy practices of the classroom. Because students' stories were valued, students often positioned themselves as readers and writers with stories to tell within this academic world.

Instructional Talk

A focus on Gina's words or language helped to further illuminate how she opened spaces for students to make connections between classroom literacy practices and their lives and literacies. First, Gina's use of open-ended questions encouraged students' divergent responses and connections to their experiences with literature and their out-of-school lives and literacies. For example, Gina asked, "What did you guys like about this one?" or "What do you think?" In the following dialogue, Gina asked students to brainstorm various genres in preparation for their multigenre research project. Students voiced multiple genres, including those that students engaged in outside of school.

[Gina stood at the front-center of the room. As students contributed genres, she wrote them on the overhead].

Oscar: Referrals.

Gina: Referrals are a genre, yes. Because do your referrals have a certain form?

Detrek: [I get one everyday

Gina: [Do referrals have a purpose?

Oscar: [Tickets.

Gina: Tickets.

Oscar: Receipts.

Gina: Receipts.

Detrek: Food stamps.

[Stacey laughed]

Gina: Food stamps. Aren't postal stamps a genre?

Omar & JJ: No.

Freddy: Yes. You have to write them guys=

Oscar: =How about warrants?

Gina: [Warrants.

Stephanie: [T-shirts. Miss, t-shirts with writing on it.

Gina: Logos. Um, so we were talking about postal stamps. Is there just one kind of postal stamp?

Sam: No, they got a postal stamp with Martin Luther King on it.

Gina: Right, you can now go into the post office and choose your postal stamp, so that is a genre. Stickers are a genre or bumper stickers.

[Students talk at once]

Detrek: Cell phones.

Gina: What part of cell phones are a genre?

Detrek: The screen. [He holds up his cell phone and points to the screen].

[Someone to the left of Gina says text messaging].

Gina: Text messaging. So we talked about text messaging. [Why is that a genre?

Daryl: [The Bible

JJ: [It's the way it comes on.

[Sam and Detrek look at camera and make faces. Detrek sings a song and dances].

Gina: Right, like why can't old people text very well?

June: Because they don't know what they are doing.

Gina: And um, are old people used to shortening their words? No, so I'll tell you right now the first time I texted I forgot how to shorten words. My friends make fun of me because I'll spell out everything and they say instead of writing to, just put the number 2. Instead of writing you, put u. It is hard to remember that is how you shorten it. So that is it's own genre. What else? [Transcribed video, 3.8.06]

In this example, several students shared genres of literacy that they encountered in and out of school, such as receipts, cell phones, and postal stamps. In several instances, Gina revoiced students' contributions and wrote them down on the overhead. Revoicing and writing down all student contributions positioned students as valid contributors of knowledge in the classroom. Rather than positioning herself as the transmitter of

knowledge, Gina provided an opportunity for students to collectively define genre and provide examples related to their lives. When students contributed to discussion, they positioned themselves as participants in the collaboration of knowledge. In addition, she asked some students to clarify or extend their contributions to make sure that students understand the concept of genre (e.g., "What part of cell phones are a genre?"). This whole-class discussion helped students make connections between an academic concept, genre, and experiences in their everyday lives, such as cell phones.

In addition, Gina frequently asked and listened to students' opinions about the structure of the classroom. For example, she asked, "Do you want to read another?" or "Anybody want to read?" In the following discussion, when students read *Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Meyers aloud in class, students and teacher facilitated a structural change based on the needs of the class. Two students, Raul and Sam argued about who would be the next person to read aloud. Trying to compromise, Gina suggested that the students read in unison. Students went with this suggestion.

Gina: Alright, let's read one more page. We are at the bottom of page 15. *Most of the day was spent…*

Sam: I got it Raul=

Raul: =Nuh huh.

Sam: We up.

Gina: We can read in unison.

Some students: *Most of the day…*

Gina and others: One, two…

Freddy: [Wait, let's read in harmony

Oscar: [Two=

Gina: =Three [Transcribed video, 4.27.06].

Although Gina suggested the structural change, students took it upon themselves to see it through. The rest of the reading time shifted from reading in unison to Freddy reading in character and Gina narrating. Gina's statement, "We can read in unison," opened up new possibilities for what it meant to be a reader in this example. Her use of inclusive language (e.g. "we") invited students to create an alternative structure to the reading. Her use of "can" suggested that a change in the structure was up to them, not her. Students took advantage of that opportunity and read the book in a different way. This example illustrated how Gina recognized social or cultural practices from out of school and was open to students transforming the structure of the room to relate to those practices. She positioned students as architects or agents of their own education and students positioned themselves as those agents when they transformed the structure of the activity.

Gina recognized and voiced her awareness of individual student's interests through talk (e.g. "You might be interested in it."). Such a suggestion reinforced the student's interest and provided support for further development of the activity. This knowledge about her students was a valuable resource when helping them with writing. In the following example, Gina helped a resistant writer get started on an essay by relating the prompt to his personal interests during prompt roulette.

> [Detrek puts his hand in the prompt bowl. He opens the paper and silently reads the prompt].

Detrek: Miss, no. I need to switch mine. This is so stupid. I don't want this.

[Gina looks back at Detrek].

Gina: What will you do on Tuesday?

Freddy: Detrek, that is what we're supposed to think and then you gotta translate it.

Detrek: When I was addicted to (.) Miss, I don't smoke. Miss, I don't smoke

[Gina walks over to Detrek and looks at his prompt].

Gina: Is it only drugs you can be addicted to?

Freddy: [Video games

Gina: [Let me see it [Gina picks up the prompt].

Freddy: You can be addicted to…

Gina: Let's change it to... What do you like to write about? What do you feel in the mood for today? [Gina read the prompt and made the question broad so that Detrek could write about it. She did not want him to take another prompt because she wanted him to learn how to write to any prompt that he was given, in order to practice for the test].

[Shane gets up and walks to other end of room].

Detrek: I feel like I want to switch this.

Gina: No. Tell me something you like to write about.

[JJ comes in late. He goes directly to the prompt bowl and picks out a prompt].

Detrek: Ooh, you gonna switch?

Gina: You can't switch. Will you answer my question?

[Gina looks at Jay's prompt and points him to the directions on the board].

[Shane walks back and messes with Sarah's hair].

Detrek: What do I like to write about, uhhhh, alien movies. I don't know, alien stories. Miss, alien stories.

[Gina looks at J's prompt].

Gina: Alien stories. Interesting. Do you feel addicted to alien stories? [Gina and Detrek laugh]. What else do you like to write about? Could you possibly be addicted to humor? Could you write about that? What does addiction mean? So beyond what you think it might mean. Oh, addiction means drugs, you need to look it up in here and find some synonyms. [Gina points to a dictionary. Detrek scratches his head. Gina moves to another student]. [Transcribed video, 2.14.06]

At first, Detrek resisted the prompt about addiction, because he could not relate to it. To help him relate, Gina asked him expand to his definition of addiction and think about his own addictions, such as humor. At first, Gina elicited a particular response from Detrek by asking him to broaden his concept of addiction. When that did not direct Detrek in a helpful way, Gina broadened her elicitations by asking what he wanted to write about. As Detrek continued to resist, Gina shifted her language to a more directive and authoritative manner in which she said, "No" and "You can't switch." Finally, Gina suggested that Detrek write about his addiction to humor. As the classroom comedian, Detrek consistently joked throughout class. Being aware of Detrek's interests and personality provided opportunities for Gina to help him make connections between school literacy events and his life. Detrek was also positioned as a writer who was capable of writing to any prompt by making connections to his identity as a comedian. Gina's use of elicitations and directives did not allow Detrek to give up, but instead

talked him through the process, thus modeling how he might think about these prompts on the test day. Gina worked to shape a figured world in which students became writers in various contexts, including standardized tests. For Gina, it was important that her students succeeded on these exams so that they could graduate high school.

As mentioned in the instructional practices section, part of making connections meant getting to know students. To do this, Gina typically told students about how she engaged in literature when she was in school. In the following example, Gina used narrative to describe her experience reading *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck.

[Gina stood at the front of the room, holding up *Of Mice and Men*].

Gina: *Of Mice and Men*. I am going to go through each book and tell you a little about it, a short synopsis. *Of Mice and Men* was actually the first book, I was never really into reading in high school and this was the first book that I actually cried at and it had a very sad ending and when I cried at this book I started reading more. Um and I never really liked reading and this is the first book that actually made me show some sort of emotion to it=

Oscar: =I saw the movie once.

Gina: [To Oscar] Then you know why I cried.

Daryl: Ain't you got a different book?

Gina: Hold on a second. Um, so this is *Of Mice and Men*. Again John Steinbeck, a classic. [Transcribed video, 3.1.06]

Gina used narration to tell students that she was not a reader until later in her life. In addition, she admitted that she cried after reading *Of Mice and Men*. Both of these details about her personal experiences with books provided opportunities for students to make connections with Gina, especially those who did not consider themselves to be readers at

this point in their lives. Gina also showed students that she was not afraid to talk about her personal connections with books, despite responses that made fun of her (Daryl). The use of narrative positioned Gina as a reader who emotionally connected to a book and was not afraid to share that emotional connection. With this positioning of herself, Gina shaped a space in which students could position themselves in similar ways. Overall, Gina's use of language worked to shape a figured world that positioned students as valuable contributors of knowledge in the classroom.

Opportunities for Identity Exploration

These connections to students' everyday lives and literacies provided opportunities for identity exploration by enabling students to explore topics that helped them make sense out of themselves and the worlds around them through literacy events. I return to Lucy's first paragraph of her *This I Believe* essay as an example:

> 365 days lost, for what, all because of a fear of starting over. I was furious with my parents because they didn't let me graduate with all of my friends in Mexico. I chose to take care of my little sister instead of going to middle school. But now I realize that it was my fear that did not let me start school in the year 2000. [Written artifact, 2.17.06]

In this reflective essay, Lucy was given the opportunity to discuss a broad topic about her personal beliefs. Because this was a reflective essay, she was required to tell a story that illustrated a belief. As seen in this first paragraph, Lucy explored several of her identities. First, she examined what it meant for her to be a new Latina student in an American high school. Second, she explored the fear involved in learning a new language and culture. Finally, Lucy implied that she overcame her fear and transformed her identity as a student in a new culture. Thus, providing opportunities for students to

make connections to their lives and literacies is one way for students to explore their identities in a classroom. Gina used this practice and talk to shape a figured world in which her students were able to make connections to their everyday lives and draw on cultural and social resources when practicing literacy. Providing connections opened spaces for students to examine tensions, such as immigration, and think about redefining their identities, as Lucy did in her essay. With these connections, students were able to position themselves and their stories as valuable and valid within the school world.

Encouragement of Multiple Perspectives

Instructional Practices

Gina encouraged and promoted multiple perspectives in the classroom. She wanted students to make connections with their own lives, but she also wanted them to be exposed to the multiple and varying experiences of their classmates and characters that they read about in texts. One way that she encouraged these perspectives was through independent reading, in which Gina gave students eight books to choose to read. Gina intentionally chose books that would both interest her students and provide multiple perspectives and stories across cultures. All of the books for independent reading dealt with different cultural experiences, such as the racial identity of a character in *The Color of Water* by James McBride, who was African American and Jewish Orthodox. By choosing these books, Gina provided opportunities for students to stand in the shoes of others and consider the perspectives from others' experiences rather than their own. These books also dealt with issues that were similar to the tensions that students dealt with in and outside of school, such as segregation and racism. In addition, Gina made

available multiple perspectives of the Vietnam War by reading *Fallen Angels,* inviting a Vietnam Veteran to speak to the class, reading an excerpt from *Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien, and discussing several letters from Vietnam soldiers. Thus, students had the opportunity to consider alternative ways of viewing the various people and events of The Vietnam War.

Students also learned about multiple perspectives through the *This I Believe* essay. This assignment not only asked them to write about themselves, but it also provided an opportunity for students to share their writing and learn about each other's stories and backgrounds. For example, as mentioned in the previous section, Freddy wrote his essay about transferring to Rushmore for the Auto-tech Program and read his essay aloud in the library in front of a community audience. This provided opportunities for his peers to better understand him and his culture in a school that did not always understand his cultural practices, such as BMX biking and playing hackysack. Gina also read Lucy's essay aloud to the class about moving to the United States from Mexico. Although it was intended to be an anonymous reading, students recognized Lucy's story and praised her writing capabilities. By valuing multiple perspectives, Gina positioned students as not only having valuable stories but as having stories that were worth sharing in order to broaden other's perspectives of their experiences.

Gina encouraged collaboration and believed that it facilitated learning and taught students how to negotiate meaning with others. This expectation for collaboration allowed for exposure to multiple perspectives. The roundtable seating arrangement in Gina's classroom was conducive to small group discussions about writing and literature.

Every six-weeks Gina created new seating charts for the students. She did this for the following two reasons: (a) she wanted to ensure that students did not segregate themselves based on race in the classroom and (b) she grouped students together based on how well they worked together academically. In an interview, Gina stated that when she did not have a seating chart "all black kids sat on one table and all Hispanic kids sat over here. That drives me crazy" [Transcribed interview, 4.4.06]. However, Gina did not always break up students if working together was the best for their academic success. For example, Gina put Frodo, Lucy, and Ana together because all of them were second language learners. This group worked hard and used each other as resources when writing, researching, and reading.

To shape a figured world in which students were expected to learn about others' perspectives, Gina tried to lessen tensions of segregation and racism by providing opportunities for students to learn about each other. In addition to their classroom roundtables, Gina used the reading/writing workshop approach in her classroom in which students were expected to use each other as tools in their learning process. For example, when students wrote a draft of their *This I Believe* essay, students peer edited each other's drafts. These collaborations provided students the opportunities to read about each other's personal beliefs and improve each other's writing.

Students were also able to experience multiple ways of "being" a reader, writer, or researcher. For example, the multigenre research projects provided students the opportunity to engage in research that was not traditional. Rather than writing a research paper, students wrote their research in multiple genres, such as a newspaper article or

advertisement. For example, JJ researched hip-hop and wrote some of his research in the form of a rap and slam poetry. This practice positioned in and out of school genres as acceptable and valid ways of writing. Thus, Gina worked to shape a figured world that encouraged and fostered multiple perspectives and provided spaces for students to position themselves and their stories as worth sharing in and outside the classroom.

Instructional Talk

Bakhtin (1981) argued that dialogue is fueled by heteroglossia or pluralism. Conversation in the classroom can provide,

> public space for student responses, accommodating and promoting the refraction of voices representing differing values, beliefs, and perspectives, and ideally including the voices of different classes, races, ages, and genders (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001, p. 252).

Gina integrated "differing values, beliefs, and perspectives" by asking for students' opinions and facilitating students' sometimes contrasting responses. When thinking about interrogating multiple perspectives in a classroom, Van Sluys et al. (2006) asked, "Do participants consider alternative ways of seeing, telling or constructing a given event or issue?" (p. 215). When analyzing Gina's instructional talk, I found that students considered alternative perceptions through the sharing of divergent responses. The following example illustrates three different perspectives on what it meant to be a "good" writer.

[Gina sat on her stool in the front of the classroom].

Gina: Yeah, you know what, instead of reading another one let's have this conversation that we had in one of my classes. We had a conversation about whether you were born a good writer or not. What do you think?

Carole: Some people are and some people aren't. Some people have to learn how to do it=

Stacey: =No, I believe that everyone can write reflectively about something that happened, depending on what happened to you.

Shane: If you put your mind to it, you can do anything. [Transcribed audio, 2.17.06]

Here, Gina's open-ended question about writing provided an opportunity for students to disagree with each other. The fact that these varying opinions were voiced freely and with little conflict indicated that this freedom to disagree was a norm for these discussions. Students were able to talk collaboratively about what it meant to be a writer and share divergent opinions that potentially exposed their classmates to alternative ways of thinking. Gina worked to shape a figured world in which diverse opinions were valued. Within this world, she positioned her students as discussants who were able to engage in dialogue about issues that affected them.

Gina's questions also helped students consider alternative perspectives by asking them to position themselves in someone else's shoes. In the following discussion about *Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Meyers, Gina asked students to position themselves as one of the characters in the novel.

[Gina walked around the room with her book in her hand].

Gina: So what do you think about this? Do you think a 17, 18-year old is mature enough?

Sam: No.

Gina: Okay, no, why not?

[Stacey, Carole, and June continue to talk about June's birthday].

Raul: [Yeah, yeah, no

Gina: [Hey, we are having a conversation here. [To Stacey, Carole, and June].

Raul: When you are 18 people think you are immature its not really like that it's=

Gina: =You are more mature?

Raul: Maybe not mature for war. [Inaudible] in the United States.

[Carole, sitting next to where Gina stands, makes an inaudible comment].

Gina: And Carole was saying that just because he is young and out of high school he doesn't really have the training as someone who is older. So those are good points either way. So we know how old Perry is. Seventeen, 18, fresh out of high school. [Transcribed video, 4.27.06]

Gina's open-ended questions that prompted this discussion resulted in students sharing multiple opinions. This freedom in discussion was supported both by her questioning and her supportive responses (i.e. "those are good points either way."). By recognizing various perspectives, Gina positioned students' different opinions and perspectives as valuable and respected. Rather than telling students that only one answer was correct, Gina tried to create a space in which questions might be answered with multiple possibilities. Thus, students had the opportunity to position themselves as participants in the classroom capable of making valuable contributions.

Multiple and alternative examples were also discussed in relation to literature, such as *Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Meyers. In the following example, issues of race

were discussed and students examined how African Americans were oppressed during the Vietnam War.

Gina: Okay, we have Rings here. Peewee is actually surprised that there are so many black guys in the army. Um, you have to realize that if we look at statistics, a large, large portion were minorities, right. What does Rings say? He wants to be blood brothers, right? So, he's like come on, let's get some blood and like… Why is Rings so worried about Whitey?

Raul: Because he is worried they won't trust him.

Gina: What is going on in the United States at this time?

Raul: Segregation.

Gina: Segregation and black men in the United States at this time are getting spit at, you know, discriminated against, so this is a huge controversial issue because black men were asked to go fight for the U.S. in Vietnam but were not given rights in the U.S. So that is like saying, go fight for a country that will not give you full rights as a person and so that has caused a whole big controversy at that time. People were over there fighting for a country that they had no rights for. Um and so that was a big controversy and then Rings wants to be blood brothers but they don't want to right? He says, "You an Uncle Tom." Where does that come from? Uncle Tom?

Raul: That is a white dude's name.

[Everyone talked at once]. [Transcribed video, 4.27.06]

Here, Gina used closed questions to elicit a conversation about an aspect of history that is typically marginalized in schools. After a response from Raul, Gina provided an elaborative explanation to refine, clarify, and elaborate on students' understanding of segregation during the Vietnam War. By elaborating on this issue in class, Gina figured the classroom world as one that valued the histories of multiple cultures.

Finally, multiple perspectives came up within discussions around and about writing. In the following example, students and the teacher worked together in a whole class discussion to name several genres. This list of genres was meant to provide them with several choices for their multigenre project.

[Gina stood at the front of the room next to the overhead projector].

Gina: Are we out of genres. What about wills when you die? A eulogy? Do you know what a eulogy is?

JJ: Yes.

Gina: So for example, when someone dies, you give a eulogy at their funeral. It is a type of genre.

Detrek: What is a eulogy?

Gina: I'm telling you. [When someone dies

Sam: [Dog tags

Gina: When someone dies they possibly might ask you to write a eulogy for that person.

Sam: No not at my funeral, they say come up here and say a few words, maybe two minutes. And then your aunties and your uncles, they talk all day.

Gina: So it is a speech given on behalf of a person that has passed away. So it is a genre because it has a certain form. So if I am giving a eulogy am I going to talk trash about the person who just died? That wouldn't be the form or technique of that genre. A eulogy wouldn't be within that form of the genre, right?

Raul: Diplomas.

Gina: Alright, diplomas. [Transcribed video; 3.8.06]

In this conversation, Sam shared his experiences with eulogies – one that varied in some ways from the one that Gina's explained. Specifically, he noted that a eulogy might not be so tightly constrained, but instead an "all day" kind of tribute to a loved one. Lewison et al. (2002) argued that reflecting on multiple and contradictory perspectives can reveal the voices that are heard and those that are missing. Sam was able to bring up a culturally-situated view of eulogies that was missing in Gina's description. Since Gina's suggestion of eulogy as a genre may have been used intentionally to elicit such outside-of-school experiences, it is not surprising that she listened to Sam's experiences carefully before restating and expanding upon this definition.

Across Gina's classroom activities, students' experiences and perspectives were welcomed into and supported within discussions and their negotiations of academic (and social) content. This practice positioned students' perspectives as valuable resources in the figured world of the classroom. Their classroom world became one that valued the insights, perspectives, and reflections of all participants – teacher and students. The awareness of new or alternative perspectives can provide opportunities for students to negotiate and resist identities and perhaps position themselves in different ways (Davies & Harré, 1990; Holland et al., 1998). Thus, Gina tried to shape a figured world in which students felt comfortable sharing the various ways in which they engaged in literacy practices outside of school.

Opportunities for Identity Exploration

Promoting multiple perspectives helped guide students in their identity exploration by asking them to examine their own personal experiences in relation to new

perspectives they were learning through literacy events and through collaboration with their peers. Through writing, discussion, research, and the reading of diverse literature, students negotiated what it meant to be a member in their various worlds. For example, in the above conversation about genres, Gina designed an instructional activity/discussion in which students had space to share their perspectives. Their identities within various worlds (both outside of and inside school) were necessarily embedded within those perspectives. So, when Sam shared about eulogies in the context of his family and community experiences, he, at the same time, had an opportunity to explore his identity as African American in relation to this particular genre.

Even though Sam did not explicitly set out to explore his ethnicity in this example, these indirect moments of identity work were valuable in the classroom because they helped students make connections between their identities and literacy practices in and out of school. Sam enacted his identity as African American by sharing this particular story with the rest of the class. This enactment was one way to gain power and status within his social world because of his identification with a particular culture. Identity exploration is not only about making sense out your own identities. At times, students examined their identities within public spaces in order to educate others about their identities. In this case, Sam shared his eulogy story to broaden Gina's, and perhaps his classmates', definition of eulogy. Thus, Sam's identity work was about discovering the relationship between his identity as African American and a literacy practice (eulogy). Gina worked to shape a space in which identity work was an ongoing and often spontaneous process.

Focus on Sociopolitical Issues

Instructional Practices

According to critical literacy theorists, teaching often does not pay adequate attention to "how sociopolitical systems, power relationships, and language are intertwined and inseparable from our teaching" (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383). Through extensive observations, however, I found that Gina made it a point to offer opportunities in the classroom in which students were able to use literacy to "engage in the politics of daily life" and better understand the sociopolitical systems to which they belonged (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383). Gina also helped her students see how personal issues were a part of a larger system by talking about sociopolitical issues in relation to literature. Sociopolitical issues, such as issues of race and sexuality, can be difficult to deal with in a classroom because they are sometimes personal. In a formal interview with students, June, Carole, and Stacey said that they appreciated being able to deal with and examine these tensions in class; however they preferred not to share issues that were personal with the rest of the class.

Vetter: Why wouldn't you want to talk about those issues in class?

Carole: People tell your business outside of class.

June: Anyway, they will talk=

Carole: =Don't want nobody talking=

Vetter: =You want to keep it confidential?

Stacey: In this class, we have friends, but you might have someone that you don't like.

Vetter: What is the reason why you don't like people?

Stacey: Messy.

Carole: Messy.

Vetter: What does that mean?

Carole: When people tell everyone's business. Everyone knows what you are doing. [Transcribed interview, 3.22.06]

Students said that they were more inclined to talk about personal issues to Gina than to the entire class. Although writing about particular political issues was not required, because the topics were connected to their personal lives, many students researched and wrote about topics that examined sociopolitical systems and power relationships. This focus on sociopolitical issues required that students identify themselves in relation to a particular culture. For example, during the multigenre research projects and the *This I Believe* essays, June chose to research the history of homosexuality because she was interested in learning more about her sexuality. By identifying herself as a lesbian in a public space she actively inquired about her sexuality, a tension for June, and the ways in which society viewed that identity. In addition, Carole chose to write about teenage pregnancy because she had just recently experienced a miscarriage. Through the research, Carole was able to learn more about the ways in which pregnancy and miscarriage affected both her physical and emotional life. Students seemed to feel comfortable examining these tensions when completing an individual project, but they were less comfortable when they were expected to share it with the rest of the class. Gina tried to shape a world in which students were able to examine tensions and issues that they did

not normally investigate in other spaces. Both June and Carole positioned themselves as researchers who engaged in this literacy practice to make sense out of their struggles with sexuality and teenage pregnancy.

The multigenre project led students to question assumptions and disrupt commonplace notions by asking students to do research and view multiple viewpoints on an issue. In the following example, Oscar talked to me in an informal interview about his topic, the war in Iraq.

Oscar: Right now it is pretty hard to find resources. Actually I already got 'em, but uh, find other resources that people wouldn't expect so=

Vetter: = Was there anything good online?

Oscar: It was mostly about dissin' Bush and his campaign.

Vetter: And you are trying to find something a little more objective.

Oscar: Yep. I'm trying to find out why people are doing that, why they don't do their own little research.

Vetter: That is why it is so hard. It is almost like you have to wait until 20 years after things have happened in order to try to get that perspective. You know when people are in it, there are always so many biased opinions and you never feel like you get to the heart of what is really going on.

Oscar: It's like a big mountain and they keep sugar coating it, sugar coating more until we find out what the truth is under that mountain. We will find out it was right in front of you the whole time. You were too stupid to hear other people. It was right in front of you. If you would just open your eyes then oh you realize, if I would have paid attention, listened, but I guess other people are worried about what other people think, so what they think. [Transcribed video, 3.28.06]

In this example, Oscar expressed his frustration with finding an "objective" account of the politics behind the current war. Oscar used strategies that questioned everyday notions of reading texts. Rather than believing everything he read, he collected information from multiple resources, such as online articles and books, to put the pieces together and develop an explanation of his own. For this instructional practice, Oscar was able position himself as a researcher who made sense out of a political issue – the Iraq War. This project provided him the opportunity to read multiple perspectives and come up with his own belief about this issue. This instructional activity also positioned Oscar as a student who dealt with tensions, such as the current war, by educating himself about various sides of the issue.

The mutligenre research project also opened up possibilities for Raul to question and resist commonplace assumptions about the prison systems. In the next example, Raul described his research project on Mexican island prison systems.

Vetter: What about you Raul?

Raul: I picked up this article "Mexican Island prison a relative paradise for convicts."

Vetter: Oh=

Raul: =It is a little island in Mexico where they go serve their prison time at. And I can relate to this. I had an uncle that lived with my aunt and everything.

Vetter: Very good.

Raul: They said it was like being free but you got to stay inside the little prison, the island, you can't leave.

Vetter: So you stay on the island. You don't have to be like in a prison.

Raul: No, there aren't any bars or anything. It is just an island and your Family lives with you=

Vetter: =Oh=

Raul: =With a house and stuff.

Vetter: Gosh, I would be scared though that other people might bother you. Are there people there to protect you?

Raul: Yeah, there are cops there and everything but=

Vetter: =Right.

Raul: I guess when you are around the same people then you treat them like family.

Vetter: Family. That would be a lot better than sitting in the other kind of prison.

Raul: Yeah, I think that the reason there are a lot of prison violations is because they are locked up and it is the same thing like if you have a dog that is tied up on a tie and if he runs loose one day he will run wild, but if you have him around with a lot of people they tend to calm down.

Vetter: Very interesting. So you are talking about prison reform. How to reform prisoners, too.

Raul: Yeah.

Vetter: Very interesting. Cool, thank you. [Transcribed video; 3.28.06]

In this example, Raul explained that he chose an article about Mexican Island prisons because his uncle was in a similar prison. After asking him about the security, he expressed his opinion about reforming prison systems. During this interview, we see Raul disrupting commonplace assumptions about prison systems and exploring his beliefs about criminal rehabilitation. Raul also positioned himself as a researcher who was able

to support his opinions about Mexican Prisons—an issue that had real-life tensions and connections for him—based on evidence from articles and books. Gina's focus on sociopolitical issues, along with students' willingness to take up and engage with such issues, helped figure a world in which political issues and tensions became a part of their everyday discussions. In turn, students were able to engage, dialogue with, and question how these larger political issues affected their daily lives.

Instructional Talk

Part of the focus on sociopolitical issues in Gina's classroom included the questioning and disruption of commonplace notions that challenged students to "question 'everyday' ways of seeing" (Van Sluys, 2006, p. 215). Gina used language as a way of pushing students to question their own assumptions through discussion about literature. Part of examining sociopolitical issues is to help students "move beyond the personal and attempt to understand relationships between personal experience and larger cultural stories or systems" (Van Sluys, 2006, p. 215). Gina regularly asked questions or made statements that helped students think about tensions beyond students' personal experiences. Unlike personal writing assignments, students were able to engage in whole class discussions about social and political issues without having to share personal stories. As students read *Fallen Angels,* they frequently talked about issues relating to race and class.

[Gina stood at the front of the room with the book in her hand].

Gina: Um so Peewee's motive for entering this army is this sense of equality that he likes. He likes being equal to one another, and remember it is the late sixties so are things equal in the late sixties?

[Students overlap]: No.

Sam: They ain't got the civil rights.

Gina: So that is what brings Peewee into the army, this sense of equality. [Transcribed video, 4.27.07]

Gina posed a closed question in order to remind students of the stories' historical context. *Fallen Angels* afforded Gina and her students the *opportunity* to consider such issues. Here, we see her use this text as a way of explicitly bringing in, partly with Sam's help, the issue of civil rights, war, and equality. Thus, Gina figures the classroom space as one that is open to the discussion of sociopolitical issues.

In the following discussion, Gina and students talked about issues of class that related to the characters' reasons for joining the military within this context.

Gina: Why does Perry enter the war?

Oscar: For the money.

Gina: For the money, right?

Shane: For the money.

Gina: So, she says needs to send money, he wants to send his younger brother to school. They do pay you money. Um, so this is why there had been a lot of controversy about where army recruits will go mostly=

Stacey: =To schools.

Gina: To schools and where else?

Oscar: Back to the army.

Gina: And to poorer schools and poor neighborhoods. They will camp

> out in poor neighborhoods because they know that those people need money, and they have more of a chance to enter them in this. [Transcribed video, 4.27.06]

In this excerpt, although Gina did most of the talking, she tried to get students involved by posing questions that focused on sociopolitical issues. Specifically, she highlighted the practice of army recruits sometimes coming to poor schools more regularly knowing they might entice poor students with money. Her point, one that she made in relation to this fictional story, went beyond a personal experience and made links to the larger cultural story of class issues that were alive in their neighborhood and school. In addition, this conversation challenged students to question the motives of local army recruits. Gina continually made these links through various literacy practices, including issues related to gender and race. In doing so, she afforded opportunities for students to dialogue about complicated social and political issues and positioned students as capable of examining such issues that may play out in their local school and lives. This practice contributed to the figured world by shaping a space that expected students to examine larger social issues, including the tensions they bring to the classroom.

Opportunities for Identity Exploration

When students examined sociopolitical issues and questioned commonplace assumptions, they were also able to explore and question their identities. As an example, I return to Oscar's multigenre research project.

> Oscar: It's like a big mountain and they keep sugar coating it, sugar coating more until we find out what the truth is under that mountain. We will find out it was right in front of you the whole time. You were too stupid to hear other people. It was right in front of you. If you would just open your eyes then oh you realize,

> if I would have paid attention, listened, but I guess other people are worried about what other people think, so what they think. [Transcribed video, 3.28.06]

In an informal interview, Oscar said that he knew a few people's older brothers and sisters who were fighting in the war and wanted to learn more about the reasons behind the conflict. This particular example of identity exploration is especially interesting because Oscar was in the process of deciding which identity he wanted to enact: A pro-war or anti-war identity. Oscar was in the "process of becoming" by asking: What do I believe? Where do I stand in this debate? Rather than allowing the media to shape this identity, he actively searched and questioned various perspectives in a variety of sources in order to create and shape an informed identity. Thus, as Gina hoped Oscar recognized his agency in making informed decisions about his own life through his research. What Oscar learned through this project shaped his identities and most likely informed any future discussions or actions related to the current war. By providing a space for students to explore sociopolitical issues, students, like Oscar, have the opportunity to examine and perhaps redefine and/or create new identities that remind students' of their agency.

Development of Student's Agency

Instructional Practices

As Vygotsky (1978) stated, it is important for teachers to help students grow into the intellectual life of those around them. In addition, it is important for students to have a sense of agency or a sense that they can accomplish their goals through particular actions (Johnston, 2004). Gina helped to build student's agency by having high expectations and challenging her students to identify themselves as writers, readers, researchers, and

learners. Through particular lessons, she enabled students to act out their identities and become agents within the literacy classroom. By becoming agents, students were not only able to evolve as literate beings, but also transfer their literate identities to aspects of their social and home worlds. In an interview Gina said, "They seriously know what others think about them, and it plays a part in their perceptions of the world." Gina knew that students were aware of people's perceptions of their school and she worried that those perceptions of low performance and violence would shape students' perceptions of themselves as literacy students. Gina was careful to engage in instructional practices that portrayed high expectations so that students would understand that she was aware of their full potential.

Gina believed that choice was an important component of building students' agency.

> Vetter: We've been talking a lot about choice
>
> Gina: Yeah, that's related to respect though. To respect them enough to say you can make your own decisions, not for you. I'm not superior [Transcribed interview, 4.4.06]

Choices in the classroom enabled students to decide both the content and structure of their assignments. Essentially, in Gina's classroom, learners were "treated as co-creators in the learning process, as individuals with ideas and issues that deserve attention and consideration" (McCombs and Whistler, 1997, p.71). Gina positioned students as agents of their own education or as students who were able to shape the figured world of the classroom.

Gina knew her students' capabilities and wanted to challenge them. She did so through various assignments. For example, the *This I Believe* essay not only expected students to write a reflective essay but also to read it aloud to a live audience and send it to National Public Radio. With these expectations students understood that she believed they were writers with something to say, not only to her, but to their community as well. Thus, Gina worked to actively position students as participants in a larger society and shape a figured world that empowered her students.

Instructional Talk

Johnston (2004) discussed the ways in which students build and try on different identities in the classroom. Teachers play a part in the ways in which students shape their identities and become agents in the classroom. Gina facilitated this agency by naming and noticing students as writers, readers, researchers, and discussants. For example, she said things like, "we are all different writers," recognizing students as literate people, capable of accomplishing these literacy events. By using the word "different" Gina also opened spaces for students to enact their identities as writers in various ways. With this recognition, students' social and cultural resources as a writer were more likely to be valued.

To build students' agency, Gina asked questions and made statements that provided opportunities for students to collaborate in order to better understand a concept. For example, Gina frequently used "we" when talking about literacy events. She said things like "Let's talk about this," or "What did we find out about this?" The use of "let's" and "we" helped to create a space in which students contributed to their learning

community. In addition, this inclusive language positioned students as authorities. Gina worked to shape a figured world that was inclusive and considered all students to be part of the classroom. This type of talk was also a valuable way to deal with the tensions of segregation and racism that students brought with them to the classroom. Gina continuously reminded students that they were a collective of intelligent and capable students.

Building agency could be seen in several classroom discussions. For example, students and teacher discussed how a person became a "good" writer.

[Gina sat at her stool at the front of the classroom].

Gina: The other thing we talked about is how do you become a good writer?

Shane: Practice.

Gina: Okay, practice, how else?

Daryl: Read a lot.

Gina: You read a lot. So, those essays=

Casey: =I read a lot and I ain't no good writer.

Stacey: That's because you be reading junk.

Casey: I read *People*.

Gina: You have to read not as a reader, but have to read as a writer.

Casey: I just read it 'cause it's interesting.

Gina: So, when you notice something that you read that you like, you should try to mock that, imitate that in your own writing=

Casey: =Like …*The Tiger*? I like that. It's got a lot of=

Stacey: =That is the only book that I have ever liked.

Casey: Because he used his experiences and what he worked with.

Gina: So I think a lot of people your age can relate to what you've gone through.

Casey: I read that book in 6th grade. [Transcribed audio, 2.17.06]

Here, Gina reminded students that they also had experiences worth writing about. By collaborating with each other about what it meant to become a good writer, Casey became acquainted with a writer's perspective that might improve her writing. She was exposed to a new tool that could play a part in shaping how she defined herself as a literate person in the future.

Gina also used students' phrases or comments during classroom talk to build student agency. For example, when discussing the literature circle book choices, Gina said:

Gina: Um, *The Great Gatsby* is also a classic. This is more, I wasn't too into this book because I'm not really into romance=

Raul: =It is like a mystery

Gina: And it is in the 1920s. [This is set in the roaring twenties

Raul: [That is the second book I read

Gina: You know with flapper dresses in the 1920s that you probably

> learned about in your history class. That is the setting, the 1920s. It is more like Raul was saying, uh, romance, mystery, this is higher level. [Transcribed video, 3.8.06]

Gina expanded Raul's comment to help her summarize *The Great Gatsby*, a technique she used often. In doing so, she positioned Raul as an authority who had valuable input, and folded his words in with her own.

Gina also helped students construct an agentive narrative or a retelling of an event from an agentive position (Johnston, 2004, p. 38). For example, she asked them to think through their actions as a writer by asking, "What works for you as a writer? It's important to make a plan." In the following example, Gina noticed they were struggling as writers and asked them if they would like help improving their writing skills.

> Gina: Um, it seems to me also, would you guys like, uh, what do you guys think about learning how to, uh, learning how to develop your ideas? It seems like some of you guys write a sentence and then you are done and you don't know what else to say. At this point in the semester you may want to learn how to develop some ideas so you aren't sitting there with a blank page.
>
> Shane: Yeah.
>
> Stacey: Me too. [Transcribed video; 3.22.06]

In this example, Gina positioned her students as agents who could decide how they wanted to improve their own writing. Rather than stating what they were doing wrong, she elicited their needs by noticing that they were having difficulty developing their ideas. By asking a question, she gave students a choice about how and what they would like to learn as writers. Both Shane and Stacey agreed that they would like to work on this issue; thus Gina conducted mini-lessons about this topic throughout the semester.

Gina's positioning of students as agents naturalized the assertion that "trying, struggling, noticing, and creating are normal, expected things to do" (Johnston, 2004, p. 38).

Gina also built agency during individual reading, by asking students to create an individualized reading contract that outlined how many pages they would read during a week. In the following excerpt, Gina guided them through this process.

Gina: Um, okay. What you have to learn to do especially if you plan on going to college or whatever job you plan on having is to manage your time. Which is something for some reason that isn't given an opportunity for you guys to actually manage your time until later on in life. So, um, especially in college because you are given so much stuff to read, you have to figure out what can I do and what can I not do. Um so questions to consider: how long is your book? So where it says pages, have a look at see how many pages is your book.

Daryl: How many pages at the end?

Casey: I can read this in four days. [Transcribed video, 3.8.06]

By guiding students through this outline and posing questions for students to answer, Gina modeled for students how to organize their reading into their daily lives. She did not question that they could or could not read the book, but instead helped them learn how to manage their time so that they could complete the task. Gina helped students think about how they would accomplish their reading in and out of school, which in turn facilitated the imagining of "a possible agentive narrative" for use in the future (Johnston, 2004, p. 33). With this instructional talk, Gina worked to shape a figured world with students who were agents and capable readers and writers.

Opportunities for Identity Exploration

Helping students become agents is an important part of identity exploration. Students not only define their identities but they also become aware that they can shape and construct identities. For example, I return to the conversation about reading like a writer.

[Gina sat at her stool at the front of the classroom].

Gina: The other thing we talked about is how do you become a good writer?

Shane: Practice.

Gina: Okay, practice, how else?

Daryl: Read a lot.

Gina: You read a lot. So, those essays=

Carole: =I read a lot and I ain't no good writer.

Stacey: That's because you be reading junk.

Carole: I read *People*.

Gina: You have to read not as a reader, but have to read as a writer.

Carole: I just read it 'cause it's interesting.

Gina: So, when you notice something that you read that you like, you should try to mock that, imitate that in your own writing=

Carole: =Like …*The Tiger*? I like that. [It's got a lot of

Stacey: [That is the only book that I have ever liked.

Carole: Because he used his experiences and what he worked with.

Gina: So I think a lot of people your age can relate to what you've gone through.

Carole: I read that book in 6th grade [Transcribed audio, 2.17.06]

In this example, both Shane and Daryle positioned themselves as those who know how to become writers – through practice and by reading. However, Carole positioned herself as one who is not a "good" writer despite how often she reads. Stacey, in her humorous way, suggested that Carole might not be reading the best model of writing. Gina's statement illustrated to Carole that she can change the way she writes by reading from a writer's lens. Rather than viewing Carole as a "good" or "bad" writer, Gina positioned Carole as a writer. Gina's suggestion that Carole shift the way that she reads may provide an alternative way for Carole to construct her identity as a reader or writer in the future. Thus, the development of agency is an important aspect of providing opportunities for identity exploration because it challenges students to rethink and reshape how they perform their various identities as students, writers, readers, classmates, etc.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the figured world of the classroom through description of four categories of instructional practices and talk that occurred in this classroom during my data collection. Data illustrated the ways in which these practices and norms facilitated opportunities for identity exploration within the figured world of this classroom. It is helpful to understand the figured world of a classroom

when discussing identity because students' identities are formed "dialectically and dialogically" within these "as if worlds" (p.49). The description of a figured world offers insight into the complex relationship between student's identities and literacies. Within these practices and talk, students were able to examine tensions and imagine how they might shape their worlds in order to deal with those conflicts. As Gina created this figured world, she positioned students as valuable participants and contributors to the classroom. The next chapter will further examine the opportunity for identity exploration through three case studies, June, Freddy, and Lucy. These case studies provide insight into how students' identities shaped their literacy practices within opportunities for identity exploration. In addition, the cases illustrate how literacy practices shape students' identities in this particular classroom.

Chapter Five

Negotiating Identities through Opportunities for Identity Exploration: Three Case Studies

> Insofar as schools seek to provide students with the means to redefine themselves and to author worlds (a goal that most teachers in this project would strongly endorse) then it is important to close the gap between students' everyday literacy and their school-based literacy. Equally important, students and teachers must challenge the contexts of meaning including hierarchy and privilege within schools that shape how people use reading and writing to fashion their senses of self and identities.
>
> (Luttrell and Parker, 2001, p. 246).

In the last chapter, I examined the instructional practices and instructional talk that shaped the figured world of Gina's classroom and provided opportunities for identity exploration. This chapter is dedicated to better understanding students' experiences with identity exploration. Thus, I investigate how three students' identities shaped and were shaped by literacy practices within events that provided occasions for identity work. Although each case told a different story about the opportunities that identity exploration provided for them, all of them illustrated how they constructed, resisted, and reshaped their identities within a classroom created through Gina's practices and talk.

To analyze the case studies, I investigated classroom talk, formal and informal interviews, and written work throughout the semester. I examined these data over time and considered how the three students developed positional identities (Davies & Harré, 1990; Holland et al., 1998). McCarthey's (2002) categories of appropriation, resistance, and transformation helped me to better characterize how students interacted with the norms and expectations established by Gina in the figured world of the classroom.

McCarthey (2002) defined appropriation as a time when students accepted the "teacher's script," conformed to rules and roles designed by the teacher and peers, and fulfilled assignments regularly (p. 29). A resistant student typically developed "counterscripts" to the classroom, engaged in conflicts with the teacher, and avoided classroom assignments (p. 30). Some students transformed the assignments and structure of the classroom in order to create spaces in which they could be successful (p. 30). To begin this analysis, I transcribed all literacy events in which each of the three students were involved. While examining the transcripts, I asked if students positioned themselves in ways that appropriated, resisted, or transformed the classroom norms and practices. This aspect of analysis helped me to better describe how they positioned themselves and others in the classroom. In order to understand why students might position themselves in particular ways in particular situations, I analyzed transcripts for the situated meanings of their words, the social languages they enacted, and their Discoursemodels (Gee, 1996, 2005; Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006).

Next, I compared how students' positioned themselves in and outside of opportunities for identity exploration. Within these comparisons, I identified moments when students positioned themselves in ways that were not typical of their positional identities (Holland et al., 1998; Maloch, 2005). I then conducted a closer analysis of those new positionings to better understand how the individual students constructed, resisted, and reshaped identities within moments of identity exploration. Analysis from the three students illustrated how opportunities for literacy events opened spaces for students to reshape old identities and imagine new identities, to transform the classroom

structure in order to be successful, and to examine tensions in order to make changes within their local contexts. Analysis also found, however, that even if opportunities were opened for students to explore identities through literacy events, students did not always engage in literacy practices and/or position themselves in new ways.

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> When I use the term voice, I am thinking of a strong sense of identity within an individual, an ability to express a personal point of view, and a sense of well-being that allows a student to respond to and become engaged with the material being studied, the other students in the classroom, and the teacher… Voice is the student's participation in and acceptance of the academic and intellectual process. It is the student's desire to express ideas in a clear, coherent way, because that student understands that his or her thoughts are important…Voice is identity, a sense of self, a sense of relationship to others, and a sense of purpose. Voice is power-power to express ideas convictions, power to direct and shape an individual life towards a productive and positive fulfillment for self, family, community, nation, and the world (Johnson, 1993, p. 86-87).

"You Can Do It! You Can Do It! Let's Go!": June's Literacy Practices

June, a self-identified African American high school junior, joined Gina's classroom during the middle of the fall semester. She entered the class with an Individualized Education Program that addressed issues related to her reading and writing skills. June's participation in class was inconsistent. When she entered the classroom, sometimes she immediately put her head down and other times she minimally participated in classroom assignments and discussions. When she did participate in assignments, June frequently grew frustrated and she did not complete her assignments. This could be attributed to her newness to the school and to her reading/writing disability. When June gave up, Gina usually worked with her individually to mediate her

frustrations. During a formal interview Gina attributed June's frustrations to being a new student and not being familiar with the classroom norms:

> Gina: She moved around from three or four different schools in a year, so I'm sure you're like coming in and wondering what they are doing and she feels lost and then you move to another school and you don't know what they are doing. [Transcribed interview, 4.4.06]

Her frustration was evident in several assignments, including her *This I Believe* essay. During those individual conferences, June and Gina typically focused on helping June recover from her frustration.

> Vetter: She doesn't like writing?
>
> Gina: No, I think she gets frustrated because she has these ideas and they don't come out the way she wants them to and then she gets the block. You know what I mean? [Transcribed interview, 4.4.06]

When June grew frustrated, she usually did not complete her assignments. This happened during a practice test for the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Although June participated frequently in the discussions about the reading comprehension section in the days before the practice test, she did not complete the short answer questions.

> Gina: She made a 50 on her test because, not just because=
>
> Vetter: =On the multiple-choice?
>
> Gina: And the short answer. She didn't do the short answer. So today I went over how to do the short answer and said you can revise the short answer for half the credit that you lost. So, I told her, "Do you know what you're doing?" "Yeah, I don't feel like it," you know how she is? So, I said, "You can do it, you can do it, let's go." And then at the end of the period, she throws it into my box.

So I go pick it up and I flip the page. Nothing! [Transcribed interview, 4.4.06]

Although Gina was concerned about June's resistance, from observations it seemed that Gina and June had a positive, trusting relationship. In a focus group interview, June said that she liked the class because it kept her awake and was "hyper." In addition, June liked the freedom to write about how she felt. She thought that Gina was "fun to talk to" and frequently talked to her privately before and after class. During an informal conversation, Gina reflected about how she hoped that June at least left her class with the confidence to carry her through her senior year. In a formal interview, Gina commented that June's participation was "random" and she thought that it might stem from past experiences with teachers who told her she was not a capable student.

Gina: She is so random too. She'll come in and be extremely happy one day and be extremely depressed the next day. I don't know, I asked her today because somewhere along, because sometimes with our kids, teacher prior telling them that they are stupid and they can't do it. I'm always really weary of that because I know it happens. So I asked her today, I was like, has there ever been a teacher that's told you, you can't do it or that you don't have the ability to do it. And she was just like no. [Transcribed interview, 4.4.06]

Gina worked to position June as capable through instructional practices and talk in order to build June's confidence. This confidence was linked to June's beliefs about her identity as a literacy student, thus shaping June's literacy practices and positionings in the classroom.

Gina: …but I think that if June got anything from my class it was at least confidence=

Vetter: =Yeah.

Gina: That's what I wanted to make sure is that she did not leave my classroom without, because she came in my classroom with none. [Transcribed interview, 4.4.06]

As Dyson (1999) stated, "A child must have some version of, 'Yes, I imagine I can do this.' And a teacher must also view the present child as competent and on that basis imagine new possibilities" (p. 396-397). Because June entered the classroom with a history of being identified as learning disabled, June often positioned herself as incapable, and she had a hard time imagining herself as a successful student. Gina's practices and use of language worked to contradict such messages and position June as a capable literacy student. The goal of her one-on-one work with June was to help build June's agency so that she could begin to imagine herself as a capable reader, writer, and researcher in the classroom. Thus, Gina's practices and talk played an integral part in June's appropriation and transformation of literacy practices.

Through observations, I noticed that June shifted how she positioned herself as a reader and writer when she was given the opportunity to explore her identities. Before examining those new positionings, I first discuss how June's identities shaped and were shaped by her literacy practices. Although several of June's identities were interrelated with her literacy practices, for this analysis I focus on three specific identities: her identity as a lesbian, as an African American, and as a struggling reader/writer. The separation of these identities, although necessary for analysis, is artificial since these identities are naturally interrelated. First, I focus on June's sexuality because she explicitly investigated this identity through her research project. Second, June's ethnicity as an African American clearly shaped how she interacted with others in the classroom,

specifically in her discourse. Finally, I focus on the ways in which June positioned herself as a struggling reader and writer because I observed her struggle to reshape this identity within several literacy events. Thus, in this section, I describe how June's sexuality, ethnicity, and identity as a struggling reader and writer shaped and were shaped by her literacy practices. It is important to note that June openly talked about being a lesbian with Gina and her classmates. In addition, her friends were aware that she entered the classroom with an IEP for reading and writing difficulties.

Based on McCarthey's (2002) analysis, June resisted, appropriated, and transformed literacy events throughout the semester. How she positioned herself depended on Gina's positionings through talk and the nature of the literacy event. Below, I will describe when and how she enacted those positions. That discussion provides insight into how June was positioned by Gina and if she resisted, appropriated, or transformed the figured world that Gina worked to create.

June's identities as a lesbian, struggling reader/writer, and African American shaped and were shaped by her literacy practices in Gina's classroom. For example, these identities shaped her interactions with others. As mentioned, June knew several of the students in the class since elementary or middle school; Stacey was one of those students. When they sat or worked together, they usually did not complete their assignments because they distracted each other. Stacey, known for her playful insults, typically said things to June that caused them to digress. Below is an example from a time when June should have been choosing TAKS prompts from a bowl and writing

possible ideas for the prompt. Instead of outlining an essay, June grew frustrated, and Stacey fueled that frustration.

[June sat with Stacey at a table. Stacey grabbed June's paper].

June: That is b.s. Give me that before I slap you.

[June takes her paper and walks to another group].

Gina: You don't speak like that in this class.

Stacey: Miss, I don't think she mean nothing. I think she is feeling discouraged now=

June: =Yes, I am feeling discouraged. Give me that paper, woman.

Stacey: Are you feeling discouraged girl?

June: Yes.

Stacey: Girl/boy. Are you feeling discouraged?=

Shane: =I feel insulted for my friend. Don't talk like that.

Stacey: What do you want, you boy/girl?

June: Big iron giant.

Shane: Thank you. [Transcribed video, 3.22.06]

Throughout this interaction, June positioned herself as frustrated and discouraged. In return, Stacey positioned June as discouraged and frustrated, in reference to June's reading and writing disability, and pushed the verbal performance further by insulting June's sexuality (i.e. "girl/boy"). And when Shane, who self-identified as gay, stuck up for June, Stacey insulted his sexuality by calling him "boy/girl." Eventually, June

resisted Stacey's positioning and called her a "big iron giant" in relation to Stacey's physical stature. This kind of joking was typical between June and Stacey, and although to an outsider may seem unfriendly, it was the way they performed their friendship. In an interview, Stacey said that even though it seemed that she picked on June and Shane, they were her friends and she always "hugged them" at the end of the day. Thus, Stacey and June's Discourse model of a friendly interaction included this playful exchange of ritual insults.

One way of looking at the social language between Stacey and June is through the interpretation of what Smitherman (2000) called signification or signifying. Smitherman defined signifying as a "verbal art of ceremonial combativeness in which one person puts down, talks about, 'signifies on' someone or on something someone has said" (p. 255). Sometimes signifying is done for fun and other times it is meant to "drive home a serious message without preaching or lecturing" (p. 255). In addition, signifying between female African Americans has been noted as a counter-language that conveys indirect messages (Morgan, 1994). From my observations, I noticed that June typically engaged in signifying performances when she wanted to avoid or be distracted from assignments. As McCarthey (2002) stated, counter or unofficial language is often used as a form of resistance. It appeared that June used signification in that way.

Teachers from different cultural backgrounds often view signifying as a "put down" (Rex, 2006). In this example, Gina said, "You don't speak like that in this class," after June said that she would slap Stacey. Through interviews, Gina stated that she was somewhat familiar with this attribute of African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

However, she felt that students sometimes crossed the line when they disrespectfully approached topics of race, sexuality or violence. Thus, Gina intervened when she felt the discourse was destructive to the classroom community. In this example, Gina made her remark because June stated that she would physically hurt Stacey, an especially sensitive issue at Rushmore because of its history of violence. Stacey stated that she did not mean anything by it, and Stacey and June continued in their signifying performances. This interaction is complicated because June was enacting her identity as African American. Gina would not have wanted June's cultural ways of talking and interacting to be silenced; however, Gina wanted to help June become less resistant and become part of the figured world of the classroom. Smitherman (1977) suggested that students "cognitive competencies, intellectual processes, and ways of seeking knowledge" should be taught using "whatever dialect the students possess" (p. 221). She argued that the teacher does not need to be able to speak AAVE, but should understand and accept it in order to use it as a code for transmitting knowledge. Throughout the semester, Gina and June negotiated the appropriateness of this kind of discourse in the classroom in order to find a balance that worked for them both.

Below, I describe June's resistance in order to better illustrate why she typically resisted classroom-based literacy practices. I then examine her engagement within one literacy event that gave her the opportunity to explore her identities.

"If I'm Not In It, I Don't Care.": Resisting Literacy Practices

As mentioned, June was typically disengaged from her assignments. In this section, I describe an example of disengagement and resistance at the end of the year

when the entire class was reading *Fallen Angels*, a book about the Vietnam War. I examined this event because I had the opportunity to informally talk to her about why she was disengaged in this particular assignment. In McCarthey's (2002) study about students' identities and literacy learning, she found that resistant students actively and passively "resisted the curriculum as a whole, the teacher's specific assignments, or the teachers' implicit expectations about reading and writing" (p. 30). In addition, she stated that resistant students typically found ways around assignments by avoiding or becoming distracted. Because of these resistances, students were limited in their reading and writing activities. In the following examples, I examine how June resisted engagement based on McCarthey's explanation of resistance. From Gina's perspective, June resisted some literacy practices in the classroom because she was not confident about her capabilities. However, June indicated other reasons for her resistance in an informal conversation about a literacy event that asked students to read letters written from Vietnam soldiers and complete a graphic organizer.

> [June stands in the hallway looking up at the war letter pasted on the wall as if it was displayed in a museum. I walk around with my camera].
>
> Vetter: What would make it more exciting?
>
> June: I don't like war crap. This is boring.
>
> Vetter: Oh, you don't like learning about war.
>
> June: No.
>
> Vetter: How come?
>
> June: 'Cause I don't care. War sucks.

Vetter: It does?

June: I'm not in it. I don't care=

Vetter: =It doesn't affect you?

June: I understand people are fighting for our country, but still… [Transcribed video, 4.28.06]

June indicated that she resisted this unit on war because she did not care about war, she was not affected by the war, and war was "boring." By resisting the assignment, June positioned herself outside of the figured world of the classroom. It seemed as if June did not want to take part in literacy events if they were not meaningful and relevant to her life. Perhaps if June had had more choice in what and how she learned, she might have resisted less. Research has indicated that by the time students reach adolescence, "their experiences with reading materials and practices in school have taught them to dislike schooled literacy activities" (O'Brien, 1998, p. 28). Part of the reason for this is because schooled literacy activities often do not attend to students' interests and needs (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000). Because June was not interested in this assignment and did not find it meaningful, she found ways to distract herself and others from completing it. This conversation could be indicative of June's Discourse model that schoolwork is not worthwhile unless it is relevant to her life; thus, June did not seem to be driven by grades.

This distraction, as mentioned, typically involved a performance of signification. This performance is illustrated in the next section in which June and Lidia worked together to read war letters posted on the wall in a museum-like fashion.

[Lidia and June stand in the hallway with the other students].

Lidia: It's actually better to read the whole thing than=

June: =It's boring.

[June nudges Lidia].

Lidia: Shh. Don't touch me.

June: You better be glad I ain't go my sticky notes, cause you=

Lidia: =You lucky I don't have my sticky notes cause I can't cuss right now cause I ain't got my sticky notes.

Vetter: Oh, is that what that is about? You have sticky notes. You curse on the sticky notes.

Lidia: Yeah, we don't cuss no more.

Vetter: Good, I like that.

Lidia: But she be pushing that little button, it's almost pushed. [Transcribed video, 4.26.06]

Here, June positioned herself as a resistant student by distracting herself and Lidia through the use of counterscripts in the form of signification. Goffman (1974) discussed the idea of a counterscript in relation to the ways in which students perform within an underlife by contesting typical classroom discursive practices. According to Goffman (1974) there were two ways in which students performed in this underlife. First, students could intentionally abandon or radically alter the structure of the classroom. Second, students could attempt to fit into the structure without pressure for radical change. Gutierrez (1995) found that students typically did the latter in which they worked around the institution to assert difference from assigned roles. In other words, students could be

both inside and outside the ritual order of the classroom at the same time (Erickson, 2004). For example, a student could talk to the teacher about an academic issue while crossing their fingers or rolling their eyes. Sometimes the underlife occurred because students were negotiating, maintaining, and balancing identities within their several different worlds. However, these counterscripts continued to limit students' reading, writing, and researching engagement (Dressman, 1997; Willis, 1977). As illustrated in these examples, June resisted by signifying or performing in an underlife. However, her social language in the form of counterscripts and resistant performances separated June from its practices and norms. This is further illustrated in the section below.

> [Students stand in the hallway, looking up at letters posted on the wall like art in a museum].
>
> Detrek: Why you putting novels on the paper?
>
> June: Ya'll grow up.
>
> Gina: You are juniors. It is a page long. You know how many pages you've got to read in college?
>
> June: What you talking about? I ain't even going to college=
>
> Gina: =Yes you are.
>
> June: No I ain't. We gonna start our own business.
>
> Vetter: What kind of business are you starting?
>
> June: We gonna start, "ya'll don't want to go to school, come to us."
>
> Gina: How are you gonna have money to pay for that?
>
> Lidia: Mama and Daddys.

June: Miss we just playin'.

Gina: You will need to take some business classes=

June: [=Miss we just playin'.

Lidia: [Miss we just playin'.

Gina: Everything requires learning.

Lidia: Miss chill out=

Gina: =You are going to college.

June: Cool it. I ain't going to college. [Transcribed video, 4.27.06]

June's reading and writing practices were limited here, although she was becoming skilled in using language to manipulate her environment and potentially gain her status in her social world. Although Gina, June, and Lidia participated in this conversation, they spoke different social languages and performed the interaction in different ways. June and Lidia engaged in signification with each other and attempted to engage Gina in the interaction, perhaps to distract themselves and/or each other from completing the assignment. However, Gina viewed their interaction as serious, perhaps taking the opportunity to position both June and Lidia as capable students who can and should go to college. This difference in Discourse models between Gina and the students did not help June and Lidia engage in the assignment, but instead distracted them further, and it posed a difficult question: What could Gina have done to use this interaction to enhance the literacy event for June and Lidia? Perhaps it would have been beneficial for Gina to disengage in the interaction and help the students make connections between their everyday lives and the war letters, since June's resistance seemed to be because she was

not interested in the topic. It is important to note that signification is not the reason why June did not engage in this literacy practice. Instead, it was one way for June to distract herself and others from the assignment. This does not mean that June could not engage in this oral performance in the classroom without a negative effect. Educators need to examine how a space can be made for students' various discourses, to be aware of the differences between performances that distract and performances that engage, and to learn how to use those discourses to enhance the figured world.

The informal discussion below provided more insight into June's resistances. The final exam in Gina's class also focused on *Fallen Angels*, which June continued to resist. In an informal interview on my last day, I asked June about her final essay:

[June sat at a corner table with Shane. Her binder sat in front of her].

Vetter: What are you writing your essays on for this test?

June: Some Vietnam crap that I don't like.

Vetter: So it's a dear letter?

June: That dear letter I ain't did.

Vetter: Oh, okay=

June: =Shhh. [June puts her fingers to her lips and looks towards Gina's desk].

Vetter: I thought that was your essay.

June: That this essay.

Vetter: What is the question?

June: The essay is about how would you react to a life or death situation in war=

Vetter: =Oh.

June: I wouldn't really know because I really don't like the war.

Vetter: Maybe you could say you would run away or maybe you went AWOL which means you went crazy=

June: =I would just start shooting. I don't care what it was I would just start=

Vetter: =What are you going to write about on your essay? [To Shane].

Shane: I don't know because I don't want to go to no war.

June: They ain't gonna draft you. You want to know why?

Shane: 'Cause I'm a G.

June: I will write it on the paper.

[June writes on the paper].

Shane: I'm a G, I already know, I have two stars at the end.

Vetter: [You could write about how you might be scared for your essay?

June: [Exactly [To Shane]

Shane: I'm a G with two stars at the end. [Shane looks at the paper where June wrote G**]. Um, I don't know. I don't want to go to war because I don't know, why shoot somebody? Well, I can understand if they are getting ready to shoot you.

Vetter: That is a good question though.

June: I don't see no point.

Shane: Neither do I.

June: Because it is just really stupid because if you don't want to be

> named a killer but you still go to war. Ain't no point, you might as well stay home. I think some people is in it for the money. They say, they say you are going to fight for America, but they are really in it for the money. That's how I feel about it. [Transcribed video, 5.17.06]

Reasons behind June's resistance become more complicated through this transcript. Although Gina believed that June's resistance had to do with her confidence, this conversation proposes that June also resisted this particular assignment because it went against her values and beliefs. The essay question asked June to step in the shoes of a soldier, but she had a difficult time imagining herself as one because she did not believe in the war. Thus, June resisted positioning herself as a reader and writer because she personally disagreed with the proposed question.

Another interesting reason that she resisted the assignment was implied when she told Shane that he would not be drafted because he was a "G with two stars," in other words, gay. At this point, June expressed her belief that homosexuals were not allowed to fight in the war. Although it is important to help students take on the position of others so they can stand in the shoes of someone else other than themselves, June was conflicted by the topic. Yet, her reasons for not wanting to write about the question showed that she critically thought about the issues brought up in the book and in the current war. Although not stated, June may have also resisted this reading because she found it difficult to identify with the male characters in the book. I view the essay question as a missed opportunity to engage June. Perhaps June might have participated in the assignment if the question was broadened so that she could discuss the conflicts she expressed to me about the assignment. For example, June might have benefited from a

question that asked her to explain reasons why she would or would not choose to fight in the Vietnam War. She may have been able to make more connections to the text if she learned more about the experiences of females in the Vietnam War. June may have engaged more fully in the assignment if the question would have been more open to identity exploration, such as "What do you think of war?" or "Would you have chosen to fight in the Vietnam War, why or why not?" June's sexuality was a tension that she constantly struggled to understand. It might have also been beneficial to turn the question into one in which June could examine that tension in relation to the war. From interviews, Gina stated that she chose this book because it offered an African American perspective of the war, but that did not seem to be enough for June. For Gina, issues of race were the most explicit, considering the history of Rushmore. However, other issues of identity, such as gender and sexuality, shaped students literacy practices as well, which may have helped to engage a wider range of students in this particular unit of study.

In this literacy event, June did not imagine herself as a capable reader, writer, or researcher. Instead, she avoided, distracted, and disengaged from these literacy practices. Thus, June resisted identities that would help her become part of the figured world of the classroom. Below I describe how her engagement shifted within a literacy event in which she was able to explore her identities.

"It's Just, I Think, How the World, How the World Is": Imagining New Identities through Multigenre Research

With opportunities for identity exploration, students might be more likely to become "actors in a story" rather than "passive observers of someone else's experience"

with more opportunities for identity work in classrooms (Moje, 2002, p. 45). During observations, I noticed that June's engagement in literacy practices changed when she was given the opportunity to explore her identities within a specific literacy event. Most prominent was how she positioned herself during a multigenre project in which she was able to choose her own topic and the genre in which she wrote it. June chose to research issues related to the history of homosexuality. During this research project, June was engaged in reading, writing, and researching in ways that were not typical of her past performances, and quite different from her typical "random" participation and behavior during other literacy events. I interviewed June informally throughout the process as she researched in the library to better understand what was motivating this change in performance. On the first day, I asked June what topic she was going to research.

[June sat at a table alone in the library].

June: Homosexuals.

Vetter: So why did you choose this topic to study?

June: I wanted to know more about homosexuals since I am kind of that way or whatever=

Vetter: =Okay=

June: =And I just wanted to know=

Vetter: =Find out more information. So, what kind of information are you going to find, do you want to find?

June: Why we, why they can't get married.

Vetter: Oh, okay=

June: =How long has it been way back when=

Vetter: =So all the laws and politics involved in that. That is really interesting. So, you are starting with the current, the current news articles and things like that?

June: Yeah.

Vetter: Cool, sounds good. Thank you. I look forward to learning more about it. [Transcribed video, 3.22.06]

June's conflict centered on her hesitancy to identify herself as a lesbian in this conversation and is illustrated when she switched back and forth between saying "we" and "they." Bakhtin (1981, cited in Holland et al., 1998, p. 178) explained that symbols for the self, or words, are often in conflict with another and can become an important part of attempting to control of modify one's behavior. This conflict might have arisen because June was unsure of how I would react to her identity as a lesbian, or it might have been because she was unsure of how to situate herself as a lesbian in this public space. Her hesitancy could have also reflected that she figured her school world as a space that did not typically accept homosexuality. Despite these discomforts, her interest in this topic seemed to motivate her to appropriate the norms and expectations of the research assignment and position herself as a researcher for an assignment that only Gina would see. Rather than "sanitizing" her reading, writing, and research topic, as students have been found to do when it comes to sexuality, June stuck with it (Blackburn, 2002; Moje and MuQaribu, 2003).

As our conversations progressed over time, June became more confident in identifying herself as a lesbian and stated her opinions more freely. I asked June what she was learning about her topic from the encyclopedia.

[June sat at a table in the library].

Vetter: Yeah. Didn't you have look at, have something about the history of it the other day?

June: I ain't really read about that one yet. I been reading the, "Are people born gay?"

Vetter: Oh, so what does that talk about?

June: It's like, they did psychology on people that were dead=

Vetter: =Uh huh=

June: =
They open their brains to see how many, to see what happens.

Me: Did they see a difference in their brains?

June: Not really from what I read.

Me: Yeah=

June: =I don't see no point of opening a dead person's brain to figure out if they was gay.

[I laugh].

Me: Why don't you just ask them when they were alive, right?

June: I can't. I don't think, you can't tell if somebody is born gay=

Vetter: =Uh huh=

June: =Its just, I think how the world, how the world is, they just become.

Vetter: So you think a lot of it has to do with environment?

June: Yeah, most likely.

Vetter: Okay.

June: It's like, I think 'cause like some girls they hang around boys and they was raised around boys and they end up coming out like that. Like they can't stand boys because they were around them all the time.

Vetter: Around them all the time, right?

June: So that's why.

Vetter: Yeah.

June: That's why most, some, that's how some people come to develop being homosexual. [Transcribed video, 3.28.06]

June continued to use "they" instead of "we" when talking about homosexuals, indicating her hesitancy to position herself as a lesbian in this public space. This shift in pronouns indicated that June was exploring her identity as a lesbian throughout this research project. Thus, this literacy practice shaped June's identity as a lesbian by challenging her to question assumptions about homosexuality. June also positioned herself as a critical reader when she stated, "I don't see no point of opening a dead person's brain to figure out if they was gay." She performed as a critical reader who questioned the assumptions made by the article and disagreed with the text. Her interest and familiarity with issues of homosexuality might have enabled June to take on these positions and engage in these literacy practices.

[June sat at a table with Shane in the library].

June: Ugh.

Vetter: What?

June: They make me mad.

Vetter: That encyclopedia?

June: Yeah=

Vetter: =They sound like they are wrong. What are they saying?

June: It said that heterosexual females and males, many people blame homosexuals for AIDS.

Vetter: Yeah, I think that is probably true that people do.

June: See, it ain't our fault that people have sex with people and then bring it home to wives or girlfriends or whatever=

Vetter: =Yeah.

June: They should just tell them instead of blaming it on us.

Vetter: Oh yeah. It's not right to blame, that is very true.

June: It's they fault.

Vetter: Unfortunately some people think it is true.

June: That is crazy.

Vetter: It is crazy. [Transcribe video, 3.28.06]

In this dialogue, June clearly identified herself as a lesbian when she said, "See, it ain't (*our)* fault that people have sex with people…" and "they should just tell them instead of blaming it on (*us*)." The use of "us" instead of "them" may indicate that June is becoming more comfortable exploring her identity as a lesbian in this public space. Although the situated meaning of the words is the same, her position behind the word

changes. Again, June took on the role of a critical reader who read about an issue and then created an opinion about what she read. She not only said that she disagreed, but she also argued that it was not right for people to blame all homosexuals for the spread of AIDS. Her emotional response to the article portrayed her resistance to a common assumption that society has about the relationship between homosexuality and AIDS.

Furthermore, June positioned herself in ways that were not typical for her in the classroom. First, she positioned herself as a confident, critical reader and researcher who struggled with a text in order to understand what she read and evaluated the material based on her own experiences and opinions. During these library days, I did not observe June get frustrated with the practice of reading or researching nor was she distracted from the assignment. She was engaged and was always able to give me an update on what she learned. In other words, I did not observe her position herself as a struggling reader as she did in other assignments. Second, June chose to distance herself from Lidia, Stacey, and Carole and worked at a separate table with Shane. Because Shane was also gay, June most likely felt comfortable sitting with him at a table because of her topic. Although they did not work together on their individual research projects, they helped each other understand the details of the project and comprehend text. This shift in behavior demonstrated how June appropriated the positionings and practices of academic learning.

Because June positioned herself as a reader and researcher within this literacy practice, she began to reshape her identities as a student in this particular classroom. Researchers have found that students are rarely given the opportunity to talk about issues

related to their identities (Fairbanks & Arial, 2006; Finders, 1997; Moje, 2000). For June, these new positionings occurred within a literacy event that provided her the opportunity to explore her identities, specifically her sexual identity. That opportunity helped her to fulfill the assignment and engage as a reader and researcher. It also allowed her more choice and, therefore, more agency with respect to her learning. Her learning was not limited, but instead was open to "personal experience and potential trajectory" (Johnston, 2004, p.41). This opportunity for identity exploration further opened a space for June – one that allowed her the opportunity to imagine herself as a capable reader and researcher. Blackburn (2002) argued that it is important for teachers to acknowledge that the spaces "we share with our students are limited relative to the many spaces where they live their lives, and the work they do is not limited to our classrooms any more than is our own work" (p. 11). The literacy and identity work that June engaged in at school may have also helped her shape the literacy and identity work that she engaged in outside of school.

McCarthey (2002) described transformation as moments when students were able to change assignments and goals into something that allowed students to view reading and writing as a practice that can be applied in other settings. Transformation also occurred when students were able to appropriate others' voices, but changed those voices to fit their own purposes, which is what Bakhtin (1981) called internally persuasive discourse. June engaged in this type of discourse as she read articles and struggled to construct her own view based on what she understood the articles to say. It is more difficult to say that June transformed the assignment into a practice that she may apply to

other settings. Yes, June will most likely use this information outside of school, but it is beyond the realm of this study to know if she will continue to read and research homosexuality in order to construct her identity as a lesbian. It is important to note that June had a difficult time transforming assignments when the space was not already opened for her. In addition, June only took on these new positions within this particular literacy event. After completing the multigenre research project, June still resisted the unit on *Fallen Angels*, as mentioned. This shift in positions is indicative of the ways in which opportunities for identity work helped June find meaning and relevance in classroom assignments. At the same time, June had difficulty finding meaning and relevance in literacy events that were not as open as the research project. June needed more support in making connections to literature and writing that seemed irrelevant to her daily life.

McCarthey (2002) linked transformation to notions of third space that argue for a curriculum that used and valued students' knowledges and discourses and facilitated learning by guided participation rather than through authoritarian means (Gutierrez and Baquendano-Lopez, 1997). Moje et al. (2004) described three ways in which third space has been perceived by educators. First, researchers have described third space as a bridge between marginalized and conventional knowledge and discourses (Gutierrez, 1999; Heath, 1983; Moll, 1992). For example, Gutierrez et al. (1999) studied how teacher and student scripts merged into a third space that bridged standard curriculum with the everyday knowledge of the students. Second, third space was viewed as a navigational space in which students were able to cross and succeed in various discourse communities

(Lee, 1993; Moll, 1992; Moje et al., 2001). Third, this hybrid space integrates knowledge and discourses from home and school that produces new forms of learning (Moje et al., 2001; Morrell, 2004; Moll and Gonzalez, 1994). Moje et al. (2004) argued that third space provides opportunities for individuals to transform their sense of self and identity and the construction of knowledge. Thus, students are able to redefine what counts as knowledge because they become a part of the content and structure of the classroom.

June was able to build a bridge between marginalized knowledges and Discourses of homosexuality in school to the learning of conventional academic knowledges and Discourses of research in school. In addition, June had the opportunity to move toward developing new knowledges and Discourses about what it meant for her to be a lesbian in school. June did not alter the classroom because it was already open for her to explore this issue, but she was able to imagine herself in ways that she was not able to before. She found a space for herself that made it possible for her to reshape her identities as both a lesbian and literacy student, reminding us that students' identities are fluid. In addition, her identity as an African American shaped how she interacted with others in the classroom. Although Gina did not silence June when she engaged in this type of social language, there seemed to be a misunderstanding about the meaning behind the playful insults. Gina and June frequently negotiated how and when these playful insults were appropriate for the various classroom contexts. Later in the semester, June worked with Gina to organize a Gay-Straight Alliance for Rushmore High School. June's willingness to be involved in a public club about issues of gender and sexuality also indicated how June used the public space of school to make better sense out of a private issue. June felt

comfortable making the private public, and took action by participating in a club whose goal was not only to be a safe place for students to discuss issues of sexuality, but also to serve as an educator to the public about issues of sexuality.

"Try, Try Harder."

On the last day of school, I asked June what she had learned from Gina's classroom:

June: Don't give up. If you don't understand what is going on.

Vetter: That is a good lesson to learn.

June: Try, try harder. [Transcribed video, 5.19.06]

In this final informal interview, June positioned herself as one who had learned to not give up, a shift from June's typical literacy practices throughout the semester. Although June will most likely shift in and out of this identity for the remainder of her high school years, this case study illustrated that opportunities for identity exploration provided a space for June to position herself in new ways in the classroom. June's case also portrayed how her identities as a lesbian, African American, and struggling reader/writer shaped and were shaped by her literacy practices. By making the private public, June learned how to be an agent or take action in order to shape the world around her. June also became part of the figured world when she was able to explore her identities and examine the tensions that she brought with her to the classroom. She might have benefited from more opportunities to engage in literacy events that provided her occasions to change tensions that existed within her local contexts.

FREDDY: TRANSFORMING IDENTITIES AND LITERACY EVENTS

In either case authorship is a matter of orchestration: of arranging the identifiable

> social discourses/practices that are one's resources (which Bakhtin glossed as "voices") in order to craft a response in a time and space defined by others' standpoints in activity, that is, in a social field conceived as the ground of responsiveness. Human agency comes through this art of improvisation.
>
> (Holland et al., 1998, p. 272)

"Nobody Hackysacks Here:" Freddy's Literacy Practices

Freddy Is a Latino student who came to Rushmore High School for the Auto-Tech program. I got to know Freddy over the course of the semester through informal conversations. He was very interested in my laptop and video/audio equipment, which he talked to me about almost every class. In addition, he spent time talking to me about his hobbies, music interests, and friends. He was open, reflective, and eager to learn more about the study. During a formal interview, Freddy helped me watch a taped conversation and make sense out of the ways in which humor played a part in students' conversations. In class, Freddy was always awake and aware. During whole class discussions, he typically participated. Sometimes he took the discussion seriously and contributed comments and other times he made jokes and distracted his classmates. When he worked on individual projects, Freddy was usually sidetracked by other people or by his intense interest in bikes or computers. When researching in the library, Gina frequently pulled him away from building his bike on the computer. Despite his difficulty focusing in class, he usually completed his work. Although Gina was sometimes concerned with his lack of focus, overall she was not worried about his reading and writing skills. In a formal interview she wondered why Freddy was not in a more advanced class. She described Freddy as "extremely smart" and said that she "asked him why, when he first started out, why he wasn't in my AP class." In addition, Freddy

knew that he had a difficult time studying something that he was not extremely interested in.

Vetter: Did you learn something from this class?

Freddy: Yeah, uh=

Vetter: =What did you learn?

Freddy: I was able to, I learned about myself.

Vetter: What did you learn about yourself?

Freddy: Like um, that it takes a long time for me to get into something=

Vetter: =Uh huh.

Freddy: Especially when it's, well, it takes longer for me to get into something when I'm not interested in it.

Vetter: Oh, that is true for a lot of people. Right?

Freddy: Eventually I ended up getting it done though. [Transcribed video, 5.17.06]

Freddy knew that he wanted to work in the area of industrial design in the future. He loved building and taking apart bikes, computers, and cars. Although he had a clear purpose for entering Rushmore, at times he found it difficult to fit in and make new friends. In an interview, he explained why:

Vetter: Did it take long time to make friends?

Freddy: It is way different. Kind of.

Vetter: You can get along with anyone.

Freddy: Only if they are willing to get along with me.

Vetter: They aren't willing to hang out with you after class. Why is that?

Freddy: Because of my skin color, appearance, probably the way I dress. No one will come talk to me.

Vetter: People don't talk to you because you are different? They think it's weird?

Freddy: What is weird?

Vetter: At McMurtry do you fit in?

Freddy: More so=

Vetter: =You can maintain friends over there.

Freddy: Yeah, I have two years of friends.

Vetter: Do you still have friends or are you out of the loop?

Freddy: We have the same interests.

Vetter: Not a lot of people ride bikes here.

Freddy: Or play hackysack.

Vetter: Yeah, nobody hackysacks here.

Freddy: Exactly. [Transcribed video, 3.8.06]

Freddy explained that he found it hard to make friends because people thought he was different based on his appearance and interests. He dressed differently than the rest of the students and enjoyed biking and hackysacking, two hobbies that were not popular among the students at Rushmore. Freddy's appearance and hobbies related to how he performed his gender. For Freddy, being "male" meant riding and building his BMX bike and playing hackysack. These performances did not always match up to how other students performed their masculinity within this classroom, making it difficult for Freddy to "fit

in." Although Freddy is Latino, he and his family had lived in the United States for several generations, unlike several of his classmates who were first generation immigrants. Freddy's middle-class status also differed from his classmates' working-class status. His difference in appearance, relating to issues of class and race, shaped how he interacted with others in the classroom. Freddy usually dressed in shorts and vintage t-shirts. He had several hairstyles throughout the semester, including a long and curly haircut, a Mohawk, and a shaved head. During social interactions I noticed that students made comments that seemed to alienate him. For example, the following dialogue occurred when Freddy was hackysacking in class when he was supposed to be working on the independent reading project. Students commented on Freddy's appearance:

[Freddy stood playing hackysack, while the rest of the students sat at their tables].

Stacey: You always wear shirts with holes in them [To Freddy].

Shane: [That was kind of mean.

Freddy: [No I don't.

Stacey: I know you don't.

June: He either wears shirts with holes in them or they are too small.

Shane: [Freddy is free-spirited.

Freddy: [Too small, too small, too small. Who said that?

Stacey: Freddy, I was just playing with you.

June: Stacey.

Stacey: Freddy, what are you doing, you big retard? [in reference to

Freddy hackysacking in the middle of class]. [Transcribed video, 4.19.06]

This interaction has similarities to the playful insults that June and Stacey engaged in with each other throughout the semester. If June and Stacey intended to be playful with Freddy, it appeared that Freddy may not have understood that intention because Freddy did not engage in the playful banter by replying with another insult. Thus, Freddy may have a different Discourse model than his classmates about how to joke around with friends. Stacey and Shane both suggested that they believed Freddy took the comments personally and Stacey assured him that she was just joking. These insults about his appearance, even if playful, may have further alienated Freddy from the social world of the classroom.

Although Freddy had a difficult time engaging in June and Stacey's "jokes," Freddy tried to make friends through other versions of humor, preferring to perform as the comedian in the classroom. He joked with his peers and with Gina and appreciated people with a sense of humor. In the section below, Freddy teamed up with Shane to joke around with Gina. After finishing an assignment, they were asked to turn it in to Gina's box on her desk.

Gina: Put in the box and the period is yours.

Freddy: Yeah. Can I put it in the rat box? [i.e. Gina's box].

[Shane puts the assignment in the box with nothing on it].

Gina: So you just want me to put a zero on this right now?

Shane: Huh [in shock]! You better not.

Stacey: [The paper

Shane: [I was just playing with her. [They look at each other and smile] You have no laugh bone in your body, I swear.

Freddy: No laugh bone=

Shane: =Yeah.

Freddy: Miss, you need some more laugh bones.

Gina: Laugh bones. [Transcribed video, 4.20.06].

Freddy aligned himself with Shane and collectively they joked with Gina. Perhaps engaging in this particular social language (i.e. humor) with Shane was a way for Freddy to gain solidarity with a classmate. Even though Gina went along with the joke in this conversation, Gina sometimes viewed Freddy's humor as a distraction. She mentioned informally that although she was not worried about Freddy academically, she sometimes lost patience with his relentless jokes.

Freddy's engagement in literacy practices encompassed all three of McCarthey's (2002) characteristics for students' primary means of interacting with the norms and expectations of the classroom. Sometimes he appropriated the expectations by fulfilling the assignment and conforming to the rules and norms of the classroom. Other times, Freddy resisted the assignment by distracting himself or avoiding it. In one case, Freddy, along with other classmates, collectively transformed the classroom into a space in which students were able to read in a way that fit their needs and interests. In the section below, I first describe how Freddy's identities shaped and were shaped by literacy events within a moment of identity exploration in a *This I Believe* essay. For Freddy, this essay was an

opportunity to explore his identity as a new student at Rushmore. I focus on Freddy's identities as a third generation Latino American, middle-class, and new student at Rushmore. Although these identities are interrelated, I separate them in this analysis in order to be able to make sense of their relationship with literacy. Second, I describe a literacy event in which Freddy and other classmates collectively improvised a literacy event by changing the structure of the classroom. Within this event, Freddy indirectly explored his identity as a reader. Within both of these events, Freddy was able to imagine himself as a reader, writer, and researcher. However he struggled to become part of the social realm of the figured world of the classroom, which shaped the relationship between his identities and literacy practices.

"I Believe in Making Sacrifices.": Reshaping, Maintaining, and Resisting Identities

McCarthey and Moje (2002) wrote that identity shapes how people "make sense of the world and their experiences in it" including texts (p. 228). In addition, they stated that literacy practices such as "reading a class novel or tagging a wall" forms identities. In other words, readers and writers come "to understand themselves in particular ways as a result of a literacy engagement" (p. 229). This was true for Freddy in his *This I Believe* essay, which he wrote about his experience moving from McMurtry High School to Rushmore High School. For Freddy, the essay seemed to be a space for him to make sense out of being a new student within this new figured world. He discussed how former and present classmates positioned him and how those positionings fashioned his identities within this new context. Freddy both performed and explored identities in this essay. Thus, the paper provides insight into how Freddy enacted identities and also how

he was in the process of making sense out of his identity as a new student at Rushmore. Freddy was very proud of his essay and chose to read it aloud in a public reading at the school's library with audience members from the community, a new form of literacy for Freddy.

Freddy began his essay with dialogue about moving to Rushmore High School.

> "Hey, I'm going to Rushmore." She looked at me in shock and said, "What?! Why?!?"
>
> "They have this auto-tech program there and…"
>
> "Well, don't we have some here, and what about me and all your other friends?"
>
> "I tried my hardest to stay here and get some but they're just not gonna have it. I guess all I can do is try my best to keep in touch with ya'll."
>
> She was the last one I told, and boy was I glad. I mean. I had to tell EVERY single friend and teacher that they no longer had to put up with me.
>
> I then went to the Principal's office to inform him of my withdrawal from McMurtry High School. I nearly cried as it all came into perspective and seemingly fell down. Two years worth of friendships, knowledge of the campus, and countless adventures, ALL GONE.
>
> That night, I could barely sleep. All I could think about was the decision that I'd just made, and how I might regret this HUGE mistake for the rest of my life. [Written artifact, 2.17.06]

Freddy's essay dealt with the tension of him moving to a new school. He positioned himself as afraid and emotional about this big decision. Through the beginning dialogue, Freddy illustrated how his friends' reactions became a part of that conflict. Thus, one of Freddy's major struggles throughout the semester was between his social and academic worlds.

Below, Freddy discussed the pros and cons of attending Rushmore in his essay. In this example we see that Freddy chose to attend Rushmore for his future.

> …I wonder what it would've been like, had I stayed at McMurtry. I always seemed to sway towards the side of me that feel I did the right thing. I mean, if I look at the pros and cons of it all I'm pretty sure that the pros outweigh the cons.
>
> The pros? Well, one of course being able to take courses that are exclusive to the school that will help me gain experience in the area of work that I wish to pursue in my high school afterlife. Also, the distance between my house and Rushmore versus that of my house to McMurtry is a lot smaller. That opens up a new world of self-transportation that I wouldn't never considered while attending "The Mac." I can ride a bike to school in a recorded four minutes, or choose to walk and only spend fifteen to twenty minutes on the streets. I am quite partial to riding my bike; I even time myself every now and then… [Written artifact, 2.17.06]

Freddy identified himself in two ways. First, he positioned himself as one who had a goal for after he finished school and understood that he needed to "gain experience" now so that he could succeed later. This ideology or Discourse model is one that differed from many students at Rushmore. Although many had personal aspirations, they typically stated that they were going to do what their fathers or mothers did – employment in working-class jobs. They felt that their destination was already chosen for them. Freddy, perhaps because he came from a different background, believed that he could fulfill his dream to become an industrial designer. Not only did he believe it, but he had also begun to take steps to fulfill that dream. Freddy's history(ies) in person included an identity as a successful student at McMurtry. This history shaped the kind of student he was at Rushmore. Freddy also identified himself as a bike rider. Being a bike rider marked him as being different from his peers at Rushmore because most students did not view BMX biking as a preferred hobby.

Freddy also positioned himself and was positioned as an outsider to both his friends at McMurtry and to his classmates at Rushmore in the section of his essay below:

> The obvious cons are; in attending a school that you have never stepped foot at, you are likely to get lost, and there's a slim to no chance that you know anyone there. Having no friends means that you re-thrown into a state of "necessary friend making." Another con, or problem, with attending Rushmore is the fact that it isn't really known to house students with much intelligence. Rushmore is typically stereotyped as a "bad" school where people get stabbed all the time." It really doesn't feel good for a friend to ask you a question and then immediately retort, "Oh wait, you go to Rushmore, you wouldn't know." [Written artifact, 2.17.06]

While describing the cons, Freddy switched from using the personal "I" to "you." Perhaps this shift was a way to distance himself from being lost and lonely in a new school or it could be that Freddy rejected those labels for himself. Perhaps the distance allowed him to explore his identity as a "friend" at Rushmore without making it too personal or emotional or the shift may indicate Freddy's resistance towards exploring his identity as a new student at this point in the essay. Freddy also described assumptions that others made about Rushmore, such as being unintelligent and violent. These assumptions shaped how former classmates positioned him, suggesting, for example, that he was not "intelligent" because of the school that he attends. Freddy did not accept these assumptions and he did not like having to deal with them either. In this essay, Freddy explored what it meant for him to be a Rushmore student. This exploration is likely to shape how he performs his identities in and outside of school.

Despite these issues, Freddy described an enjoyable experience at Rushmore at the end of his essay:

> So for doing what I believe in, making sacrifices to benefit one's self, and having to put up with the constant "BS," I think I'm enjoying my "Rushmore Experience," and I have and will continue to try to obtain all the knowledge and experience out of it as possible. [Written artifact, 2.17.06]

Freddy shifted back to the personal "I" indicating the exploration of his identity as a new student and the confidence about his decision. Throughout the essay, Freddy suggested that his Discourse model of success assumed that one must make sacrifices in the present to benefit the future. Freddy enacted that ideology by sacrificing his social life in order to study in the auto-tech program at Rushmore. His decision also reflected his agency. Freddy actively sought out how to make this program work for him. Thus, Freddy took action to shape his academic world.

In this essay, it seemed that the tensions involved in performing as a "new student" shaped what he chose to write about. Within that performance, Freddy explored what it meant for him to sacrifice his friends and learn about a new figured world. Freddy appropriated this assignment by following the rules and roles designed by the teacher (McCarthey, 2002). He clearly understood the purpose of the essay and even read it aloud in the library, as Gina had hoped. This experience provided Freddy the opportunity to position himself in a new way as a writer since he had never read his written work aloud to a community audience. Because this was an assignment open to students' interests and experiences, Freddy did not have to transform the assignment to fit his needs as a student. However, he took advantage of that opportunity and examined the tension of sacrificing his social world for the sake of his future. The opportunity to write this essay offered Freddy an "identity as a knower. It answered the question 'Who am I?' and 'what is the world?'" (Palmer, 1993, p. 53). Like June, Freddy struggled to make this experience his own through words. He struggled with the words of former friends and new classmates about his identities, including comments about "who he was" and

"who he should be" in order to find a space for himself within the figured world of this classroom. Thus, Freddy may have been able to become part of the figured world of the classroom by sharing his essay and examining the tensions of being a new student.

In the next example, I describe how Freddy, along with other classmates, collectively transformed the structure of a literacy event that enabled him to explore himself as a reader and perform as a comedian.

"Read Off": Transforming the Structure of a Literacy Event

Research has established that classroom interactions are complicated and frequently influenced by issues of power and status (Alvermann, 1996; Ellsworth, 1989; Finders, 1997). Within a figured world, students enact their identities in various ways for various reasons. These enactments can influence how students become a part of classroom conversations and how they position themselves and others. Positionality, in this sense, are day-to-day relations of power and entitlement, and they depend on the people and context surrounding that person. Identity enactment has also been described as a performance or an "act of doing" rather than "being" (Butler, 1990). Freddy typically positioned himself as the classroom comedian, which sometimes distracted him and his classmates from completing their work. He may have performed in this way in order to gain power and status in the classroom with his new classmates. The following example shows how Freddy's humor, along with other classmates, collectively transformed a one-person reading event into a reader's theater with Freddy as the main character.

One afternoon, the whole class was reading *Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Meyers. Raul volunteered to read, but Gina stopped his reading to promote discussion about the chapter. After a short conversation, Raul volunteered to read the next section aloud. Sam also wanted to read aloud, which started an argument between Raul and Sam about who was a better reader. This competition is seen in the transcription below:

Gina: Are we having a reading battle? [Laughs].

Sam: I can read better than you=

Raul: =He can't read. Look, he can't even hold the book right.

Gina: Reading battle [singsong like].

Freddy: [Read off.

Gina: [Read off.

Stacey: Like that little dance off we had [Laughs].

Gina: Okay, let's try to get another page and a half in before the end of the period.

[Everyone talks at once about the read off].

Stacey: [Shane was like get it, get it boy [Dances].

Gina: [All right, we are in the middle of page fifteen. Stay with me for another five minutes, okay.

[Raul reads from the book].

Gina: All right, let's read one more page. We are at the bottom of page 15. *Most of the day was spent…*

Sam: I got it Raul=

Raul: =Nuh uh.

Sam: We up.

Gina: We can read in unison.

Some students: [*Most of the day…*

Gina: [One, two…=

[Students begin reading again].

Freddy: =Wait, let's read in harmony.

Oscar: Two=

Gina: =Three.

[Some students read, but they are not on the correct line. Everyone laughs].

Sam's question, "Can I read?" played a part in the negotiation of how reading occurred in the classroom. Although Raul was happy to dominate the reading, Sam changed those norms, especially after Raul's negative positioning. Sam and Raul often engaged in this type of competitive social language in Gina's classroom. This may have been because both Raul and Sam were seniors, repeating Gina's class. Thus, they had learned this information the year before and might have felt that they needed to prove their knowledge about the book. Again, Raul, and later Freddy, distracted the class with comments about Sam's inability to read, using characteristics of signification. Rather than viewing the interaction as disruptive, Gina used the term "reading battle" to turn the situation into a reading competition. The "read off" continued to evolve:

Sam: Where we start at Miss?

Gina: [*Most of the day.*

Sam: [*Most of the day was spent sitting around. Some of the guys, some of the guys were talking about how hard they had it, how hard they had it in their basic training. They had all had the same story no matter where they had taken base*. [He laughs].

Freddy: *I thought the story was part of the training. There were a lot of black guys there.* [Students laugh]. *I didn't think there would be so many. Most of them stayed off to themselves but one guy was making the rounds of all the other blacks.*

Detrek: *The way I figured it We've got to stick together over here. He had three rings, mmhmmm, he waved them in the air. I can't touch no "Whittee" I have to watch my back=*

Gina: =Whitey.

Freddy: Whittee.

[Overlap in comments and laughter about Detrek's mispronunciation].

Gina: *So, what do you want to do, I ask. We've got to make it over something, Ray said. You know, make us some blood. That's symbolic of what we gonna be about over here in this strange land.*

Raul: *I watched him take out a pocket knife and cut his wrist. Then he handed the knife to Peewee=* [Transcribed video, 4.26.06]

Freddy, Sam, Detrek, and Raul transformed the event into a popcorn reading in which students took turns reading various sections of the book. Freddy, however, used inflexion in his voice as if he was engaging in a performance, similar to a reader's theater. Detrek followed the same style, but was distracted after he mispronounced a word. Raul brought the reading event back to popcorn reading.

Freddy: *You've got to be out of your mind* [he said in the voice of the character].

[Everyone laughs at Freddy's characterization].

Gina: Go ahead, *Peewee said.*

Freddy: *You sit there cutting your own damn self. You don't need nobody watching your back.*

[Students laugh again].

Gina: *You don't understand, Ring said. This is symbolic of our blood.*

Freddy: *Well, …blood in my African veins.*

Gina: *Peewee said. You ignorant, Rings said.*

Stacey: Ooh, she said, you ignorant.

Gina: *Rings said, I got – you uncle tom –*

Freddy: *That fool crazy.*

Gina: *Play checkers=*

Gina: =Okay, we have Rings here. Peewee is actually surprised that there are so many black guys in the army. Um, you have to realize that if we look at statistics, a large, large portion were minorities, right. What does Ring say? He wants to be blood brothers, right? So, he's like come on, let's get some blood and like// Why is ring so worried about Whitey?

Raul: Because he is worried they won't trust him.

Gina: What is going on in the United States at this time?

Raul: Segregation. [Transcribed video, 4.26.06]

[The discussion about the relationship between the Vietnam War and segregation continued until the end of the period.]

Freddy, Raul, Sam, and Detrek transformed the whole-class reading into a performance, perhaps a reading that fit their needs as interests as readers. Collectively, the students changed the structure of the literacy event into a reading that was both humorous and

academic. By contributing to this transformation, Freddy may have gained solidarity with his peers and possibly gained status within the social realm of the classroom. This collective transformation may also be viewed as a space in which these students positioned themselves as agents of their education. In other words, students were able to change the structure of a classroom event into one that worked for their needs as readers. Although Gina opened a space for transition by asking the students if they were having a "reading battle," students took over and shifted the reading into various structures. Teacher and students seemed to have a similar Discourse model or assumption of how to behave and talk during a "reading battle" which seemed to further engage students in the reading. This "read off" also provided an opportunity for Freddy to explore his identity as a reader. Although he did not explicitly examine this identity, he positioned himself in a new way that he may use again in the future, in and/or outside of school. By gaining solidarity with Sam, Raul, and Detrek, Freddy may also be positioned by his classmates in new ways in the future.

It is also important to note how Freddy's identities were performed in this "read off." The book *Fallen Angels* is written by an African American author, Walter Dean Meyers, and includes both White and African American characters fighting in the Vietnam War. When Freddy read, "There were a lot of black guys there," many students laughed. The student's laughter might be an indication that they felt uncomfortable with Freddy's reading about black people because it "made race visible" (Greene and Abt-Perkins, 2003). When Freddy began his interpretation of the African American character's voice, many students laughed again. Freddy took a risk because his

characterization of the African American character could have been perceived as mocking or stereotyping. As mentioned, issues of race and segregation were an ongoing tension in the school and classroom. Thus, students' laughter may be interpreted as discomfort. However, students did not protest Freddy's performance, as some students did when they felt offended. Perhaps students laughed because they thought Freddy's reading was funny and entertaining.

Humor is a large part of the improvisation of language in the figured world of this classroom. Holland et al. (1998) defined improvisations as "impromptu interactions that occur when our past, brought to the present as habitus, meets with a particular combination of circumstances and conditions for which we have no response" (p.18). Similar to bricolage, improvisation can be seen as a source of innovation in that it expropriates and then makes use of certain materials to accomplish different purposes from those for which the materials were originally intended" (p.166). Brocolage is a "process of hybridization" that connects "the old with the new" (p.167). Because Holland et al. (1998) argued that people resist or appropriate identities, they pointed out that there is space for change. It is within these improvisations or new ways of positioning identities that people begin to make changes for themselves. Even though one improvisation is not enough to dramatically change a person, every improvisation offers possibilities for reshaping potential identities (Maloch, 2005). Without any "laugh bones," a teacher or student might have a difficult time understanding the dynamics of talk in this literacy event. Freddy and his classmates responded to this traditional reading in an unexpected and instructionally meaningful way. This collective improvisation

afforded Freddy new possibilities for reshaping himself as a member of the classroom. His humor, typically perceived as distracting, was one way that Freddy aligned himself with peers and possibly gained him status among classmates that did not always accept him.

In relation to notions of third space is McCarthey's (2002) concept of transformation in which students alter "the classroom norms enough to create spaces in which they could be successful inside and outside the classroom" (p. 30). Sometimes a new space that serves the needs of students is created through the unplanned and unpredictable. This improvisation brought the participants in the classroom into a third space by redefining what it meant to read a book aloud in class. Humor merged the teacher and student script so that the event was less scripted and more heteroglossic (Gutierrez, 1995). Freddy and his classmates altered the norms of the reading in order to be the kind of readers they wanted to become.

Gina also played a role in Freddy's improvisation. She positioned Freddy and the other students as transformers of the classroom structure. By asking Raul and Sam if they were having a reading battle, Gina shaped a figured world that integrated the needs and preferences of her students. Gina also recognized humor as an important part of the figured world of the classroom. Rather than viewing the students' transformation as a disruption, Gina encouraged it because she recognized that students were excited about reading in this new way. This improvisation is especially interesting, because it dealt with the structure rather than the content of a literacy event. These transformations are

difficult because they are unplanned and unpredictable. Gina and her students took advantage of this spontaneous moment in order to construct a new kind of reading.

From Freddy's essay, interview, and classroom observations, it is clear that Freddy struggled to maintain certain identities while at the same time struggled to become an accepted member of a new figured world. One way that he tried to "fit in" was by using humor as a resource. Through the "read off," Freddy contributed to a collective improvisation that transformed the structure of the reading. This improvisation had the potential to help Freddy author himself within the social and academic realms of the figured world of the classroom (Holland et al., 1998). Freddy's case study illustrated how identity exploration created new spaces for him to position himself in ways that allowed him to transform literacy practices to better suit him. In addition, Freddy's ethnicity and class shaped how he interacted with students in the classroom, and struggled to maintain, resist, and reshape identities that enabled him to become a part of the figured world of Gina's classroom.

LUCY: KEEPING THE PERSONAL PRIVATE

> First, the extent to which students bring their personal voices into a public forum, such as in the discussion of text, is strongly influenced by competing discourses within the classroom. A students' public utterance in a classroom enters into a dialogic relationship (Bakhtin, 1981) with the different theories of knowledge held by teacher and classmates; with evolving ethical standards of public talk; with discourses of gender, class, and race; and with multiple social discourses that influence students interactions in and out of class.
>
> (Phelps and Weaver, 1999, p. 350).

"She Whispers When She Talks:" Lucy's Literacy Practices

Lucy is a Latina student who moved to the United States from Mexico when she was in middle school. She plays soccer and typically made A's and B's in Gina's classroom. She has long, dark hair and usually wore jeans and t-shirts. Lucy struggled most with being a second language learner. However, by the time she entered Gina's room, she had an advanced mastery of the language. In a formal interview, Gina described Lucy as a student who is "really concerned with grades." However, Gina worried that Lucy did not have the confidence to match her abilities. Gina stated:

> Gina: I think it's just, I don't know. She especially (.) I don't know why she doesn't have more confidence. I think its because when I read her essay, remember her saying that she was so used to make A's in Mexico and she came here and she made Cs because it was so difficult for her. [Transcribed interview, 4.4.06]

Gina felt as though Lucy was one of the best writers in the class, but Lucy disagreed. Gina described Lucy as a perfectionist who was not typically satisfied with what she wrote. I observed Lucy talk with Gina individually about her *This I Believe* essay and her practice TAKS essay. Gina spent time building Lucy's confidence by reviewing the essay. After reading her *This I Believe* essay, Gina tried to encourage her to submit it to National Public Radio, but Lucy did not agree, a decision that puzzled Gina:

> Gina: But she's just, something happened with her confidence on the way. Because I had to beg her to submit to NPR. Like she wouldn't do it.
>
> Vetter: Her essay was wonderful.
>
> Gina: I know. You don't even know these people, its okay. I thought it was, I don't want to share my story. You don't even know these people, its fine. I think it was a confidence, like she didn't think it

was good enough. But you have one of the best essays in this class. [Transcribed interview, 4.4.06]

Lucy also did not like to speak in front of the whole class, which sometimes frustrated Gina because she felt as though Lucy had a lot to offer the classroom discussion. As a result, Gina described Lucy as someone who "whispers when she talks." She believed that her resistance to talking in whole groups was because she positioned herself as shy about being a second language speaker. In a formal interview, Gina talked about the conversational norms of her ESL students.

Gina: It's weird how they (ESL students) will totally talk to me one-on-one, individually, but when it gets to whole class, no. You know what I mean?

Vetter: Do you think it is about second language and they are afraid to say something wrong?

Gina: I think their accent. I know a lot of ESL kids are very worried about their accent. [Transcribed interview, 4.4.06]

In informal conversations, Gina said that she hoped Lucy and her other ESL students felt more comfortable being a part of the whole-class discussion because she worried that not all perspectives of the classroom were being shared. This was a valid concern, given the historical context of the school. As mentioned, Rushmore originated as a predominately African American school. In recent years, the culture of the school shifted with the integration of the Latino/a population. During a project on issues of race at Rushmore, Gina's Advanced Placement students interviewed and surveyed students about segregation in the school. Some responses by Latino/a students indicated that they felt as

though "African American students thought they ruled the school." Thus, Gina struggled to position her ESL students as part of the classroom conversations.

In order to better understand why Lucy did not want to talk in front of the whole class, I asked her to complete a written interview. When asked if she felt comfortable talking in class, she stated:

> Yes, because I don't like to talk in front of my classmates. I am too shy. I don't want to feel embarrassment of my English, I am too shy. I feel uncomfortable talking in front of the classroom [Written interview, 4.27.06]

Here, Lucy positioned herself in Gina's classroom as one who was too shy or embarrassed to talk in front of the entire class because of her English skills. In an attempt to understand if this was the case in all of her classes, I asked if she talked differently at home than she did in school. Lucy stated that she felt more comfortable talking at home because she knew "the people that live there." At school, she talked differently because she felt she did not know the students. Much research has found that classrooms struggle to make students' Discourses visible and valuable in the classroom (Cazden, 2001; Heath, 1983, Michaels, 1981). Because of the recent immigration debates, Lucy may have felt that some classmates did not value her culture or way of talking. Thus, Lucy's reluctance to talk might be tied to maintaining her Latina identity. Gonzalez (2001) argued that language is the "building block" of students' ties to identity (p. 71). Bilingual students often feel a "deep and fierce loyalty to the emotions being Latino engenders. On the other hand, there is a desperate bid to belong to a totality that is greater than they, powerful and alluring in its domination of their lives" (p. 60). Perhaps Lucy was resistant

to becoming a part of the discussion because she wanted to maintain her Latina identity or was afraid that her Discourses would not be valued by other classmates. In addition, Gina's resistance to talk in the classroom and her typical appropriation may have been one way that she performed her gender. Studies have found that females typically talk less and are more likely to be compliant in the classroom (Sadker and Sadker, 1986). Although her gendered identity was not as explicit as her identity as an immigrant and second language learner, her female identity sometimes peeked out within these moments, which portrayed how intersecting identities shape students literacy practices.

In the written interview, Lucy described her school as one "with great opportunities for the students." She commented that some "students don't care about their education, they just came for fun." Lucy also stated that she liked her English classroom and enjoyed how Gina taught. She felt that her classmates respected her and that she "learned a lot of things that helped us to pass the TAKS." When Lucy talked about the TAKS test she expressed her concern about passing the test (Lucy passed the exam during her junior year).

In class, I noticed that Lucy typically worked with two other students who were also ESL students, Frida and Frodo. Lucy felt comfortable talking in this small group, perhaps because she could switch back and forth from English to Spanish. All three of these students helped each other out and typically completed their assignments. More specifically, Lucy always completed her assignments, but she sometimes took longer than others because she never seemed to feel that her assignments were good enough. She took her work seriously and was not easily distracted. According to McCarthey (2002),

students sometimes appropriate or conform to the expectations and norms of the classroom. Lucy typically appropriated the set norms of the classroom by following the directions and consistently checking in with Gina about her assignments. She completed literacy tasks in the classroom, conforming to the rules and roles designed by the teacher and peers. McCarthey also describes a characteristic of appropriation as viewing reading and writing as classroom activities that had limited use outside of the classroom. Lucy, however, seemed to view these literacy tasks as a way for her to become a better English speaker, which would help her in all aspects of her life, including those outside of school.

Lucy entered Gina's classroom with a history as a native Spanish speaker. This history shaped her literacy practices in the classroom. As noted in her written interviews, Lucy did not talk in whole-class discussions because she did not feel comfortable speaking English. However, Lucy also entered Gina's classroom with a history as a "good" student in schools in Mexico that also formed her literacy practices. Although Gina worried that Lucy's confidence did not match her capabilities, Gina recognized that Lucy was an excellent writer and literacy student. Unlike June, Lucy had the experience of being successful in another environment, which may have helped her become successful in a U.S. school.

In the following section, I examined how Lucy's identities shaped and were shaped by a literacy event that provided the opportunity for her to explore her identities. First, I investigated the ways in which Lucy described how she transformed her identities after moving to the United States from Mexico. Second, I describe how Lucy resisted and maintained identities, specifically related to her identity as an immigrant, Latina

student, during an anonymous reading of her *This I Believe* essay. Although several of her identities shaped and were shaped by literacy practices, I focused on her Latina identity because that was the identity that she explicitly explored in her essay.

It is important to note that Lucy did not feel comfortable interviewing in front of the video camera and talking in front of the whole class; as a result, data collection for her case study was not as rich as for June or Freddy. In addition, because I did not speak Spanish, building a trusting relationship with Lucy took longer than it did with June and Freddy. However, I chose to include Lucy as a case study because her enactment and construction of identities within opportunities for identity exploration illustrated how her language and ethnicity as a recent Latina immigrant, shaped and were shaped by her literacy practices in the classroom.

A Story of Transformation: Reshaping Identities in a U.S. Classroom.

Race, class, gender and sexuality shape and are shaped by the ways in which students perform identities within the figured world of a classroom (Holland et al., 1998). For Lucy, her identity as an immigrant from Mexico was an important dynamic of her relationship to literacy practices in the classroom. Researchers argue that it is important, especially for students whose first language is not English, to teach in "ways that respect students' construction of meaning and the connections they make outside of school, in the home" (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000, p. 59). In addition, research emphasizes the importance of educators understanding and building on the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their students (Au, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Moll et al., 1992). This opportunity for identity exploration provided a space for Lucy to make connections

between her home and school worlds and to draw on her cultural background. As described in chapter four, students created *This I Believe* essays in which they wrote about a personal belief in a format similar to those written and read on National Public Radio. This essay opened an occasion for Lucy to explore her identity by describing what it was like to move to the United States from Mexico with her family when she was in middle school.

> 365 days lost, for what, all because of a fear of starting over. I was furious with my parents because they didn't let me graduate with all of my friends in Mexico. I chose to take care of my little sister instead of going to middle school. But now I realize that it was my fear that did not let me start school in the year 2000.
>
> My parents tried to convince me to start middle school in the United States. "You will meet new friends. You could even learn a new language and graduate from middle school and then high school."
>
> " No way and I don't want to go and I'm not changing my decision," I answered my mom. My dad became indignant because of my response.
>
> He yelled at me. "If you don't want to go to school, fine, don't go, but later I don't want to hear that you want to go to school," he replied.
>
> I felt dejected because I wanted to study but I didn't want to start all over again. I didn't want to feel lonely and lost in an unknown school. I didn't want to feel different just because they spoke a different language that I didn't understand a word of. As I walked to the store to buy groceries and pampers for my little sister, I saw many students of my age. They were walking their way to school with their school supplies, talking and laughing, enjoying the day. I realized that I was throwing away my future and dreams and living the life of an adult all because of my fears of starting all over again.

In the first half of this essay, Lucy explored her identity as a recent immigrant to the United States. She positioned herself as someone who was different because of her language and seemed to figure her world as one that would not accept her differences. For Lucy, this essay became a space for her to describe the how she reshaped her identities after moving from Mexico to the United States. For example, after realizing

that she did not "want to feel different just because" people "spoke a different language," Lucy attended school and gradually learned English. Now, Lucy is bilingual, speaking both English and Spanish. Lucy's moment in the grocery store was one of transformation. From that description, Lucy suggested having a Discourse model that assumed school would enable her to reach her future dreams. In the last paragraphs of her essay, she described that transformation over several years.

> It was the next day when I came to the decision of returning to school to finish my education. Finally I overcame my fears and started middle school in January 2001. I started in seventh grade. The first month was terrible. I got seventies in all my classes. Although it was difficult because of the language, I realized that middle school was not as awful as I thought it was. My grades went from seventies to nineties. Afterwards I became one of the top ten students in my middle school. When I started high school, I felt more confident in myself. Since that day I've been working hard to pass all my classes. I come every day of school and I care about my low grades. Sometimes I stayed after school to finish my work and I feel proud of myself knowing that I do my best everyday and at the end everything pays off.
>
> If I hadn't overcome my fear then I wouldn't be in eleventh grade and looking forward to graduate. I wouldn't even be playing my favorite sport soccer. [Written artifact, 2.17.06]

Through this description of her transformation into a new culture, Lucy's agency became apparent. Thus, Lucy realized that she was able to shape her future by overcoming her fears. Holland et al. (1998) state that agency occurs when people are able to "imagine and create new ways of being" (p. 5). Lucy imagined her future self and created new ways of being a student within the figured world of Gina's classroom. As Holland et al. (1998) explained, it is important to pay attention to agency, even though it is "frail, especially among those with little power" (p. 5). Lucy's discussion of agency and transformation is especially insightful to the world of education because it describes the

ways in which she has achieved success despite having to create new identities within a new figured world.

Lucy appropriated, resisted, and transformed literacy practices within this particular assignment. Lucy also positioned herself and performed as a writer throughout this essay. Lucy appropriated the rules and expectations of this assignment with her use of academic language, but was also able to transform the essay into her own by writing about her experiences and exploring her identities. This space was already open for Lucy, but she took advantage of that space in order to examine a tension that existed in her various worlds. Lucy also resisted the identity that she would not be successful because she did not speak English fluently. In the next section, I describe other ways that Lucy resisted positionings that related to her identity as and immigrant and English Language Learner.

"She Speaks Perfect Now": Keeping the Personal Private

As mentioned, Gina read Lucy's *This I Believe* essay aloud anonymously, with Lucy's permission, for the purpose of talking about the content and structure of the essay. Despite Lucy's perceptions of her capabilities as an English speaker, Gina believed that Lucy was an outstanding writer and wanted to share that skill with her classmates. The following short discussion occurred after Gina read Lucy's essay aloud:

[Students sat at their tables. Gina sat on her stool as she read Lucy's essay].

Stacey: Lucy=

[People clap].

June: =Busted.

Gina: So, what was the focus of that essay? What was her point?

Carole: I'm sorry, what?

Stacey: She overcame her fears.

Gina: When you overcome your fear, [you want to accomplish something.

Carole: [You didn't speak English when you came for real?

[Lucy nods at Carole].

Carole: Did people look at you like?

Stacey: She looked at you like, huh?

Carole: For real? I just want to know.

[Lucy does not respond]. [Transcribed, 2.17.06]

Gina read the essay anonymously, but Stacey immediately recognized Lucy's story and gave her away. Although Stacey's knowledge about Lucy's experiences can be viewed as an indication that students of different cultural backgrounds knew each other in the classroom, it still seemed uncomfortable for Lucy. Gina's intentions were to boost Lucy's confidence, but because it did not go as planned, this situation seemed to have positioned Lucy negatively by making her feel alienated from the culture of the classroom. When Carole asked Lucy questions about her life beyond what was mentioned in the essay, Lucy did not respond. Based on her comments in the written interview, it seemed as though Lucy continued to see the classroom world was one that would criticize her second language speaking skills. Lucy may have felt uncomfortable with people talking

about her experiences as if she was not there by using the pronoun "she" instead of "you." The situated meaning of "like" as "different" or "weird" in Carole's question "Did people look at you like?" may have positioned Lucy as foreign in a space in which she wanted to fit in. In addition, Lucy might not have wanted to read her essay and talk about it because she wrote about a personal experience. Unlike June, she might not be comfortable making the private public. Nonetheless her refusal to speak can be construed as an act of agency within the classroom.

Gina recognized that Lucy was uncomfortable and tried to bring the conversation back to the point of the activity, which was to discuss the format and style of the essay.

Gina: So, for one thing, the essay was about overcoming fears. Was that from the beginning to the end? Did it stay focused?

[Students nod].

Gina: So, one thing is that it was focused from beginning to end. If I ask you what the point is and you can tell me, that means it is a pretty focused essay. So, in turn you have to take that for yourself. What you should do on test day is read your essay and ask yourself, what is the point of this that I'm writing? And if you can figure it out then your essay is focused. What else was done well? She had the experience to support it, right?

Shane: Yeah, she used big words, like indignant.

Stacey: She used dejected, I heard that.

Gina: Yes, indignant, so remember all the words you've learned and use them. You also have a thesaurus, so a th-thesaurus, so use it if you so desire.

[Students laugh at her stuttering of the word].

Gina: Use other words. What else did she have? Was it a strong voice?

Stacey & Carole: Yes.

Gina: Why? Did she have dialogue?

Stacey: Yes

Gina: Yes, she had dialogue=

Shane: =Between her and her dad.

Gina: Between her and her dad, so that was done well. So, all of those things you have to remember. What prompt, what essay prompt could this be? Either explain the importance of or describe a time when=

Shane: =Explain the importance of her relationship, that's just…

[Stacey laughs].

Shane: Well, I=

Gina: =Explain the importance of=

Shane: =Overcoming fears

Gina: Overcoming fears, thank you. [Transcribed video, 2.17.06]

Gina most likely viewed this reading as an opportunity for students to learn more about Lucy's experience as an immigrant from Mexico. In addition, in informal interviews, Gina expressed that she originally believed that this type of reading and discussion would help Lucy realize that she was a talented and capable writer. During analysis, there were instances in which students positioned Lucy as a writer from whom they could learn. For example, one student commented that "she used big words, like indignant." In addition, another student mentioned that she used dialogue "between her and her dad." Because Gina read her essay aloud for the purpose of talking about what writers should do when

they write, she positioned Lucy as a model writer. Lucy was also positioned as an immigrant who overcame challenges and fears. Students explained that the focus of her essay was that she "overcame her fears" or overcame a challenge. Students were surprised that she did not know English before she came to the United States, because "she speaks perfect now." This positioned Lucy as an experienced English speaker. However, Lucy resisted these positionings by not participating in the dialogue. For teachers it is important to challenge students but at the same time to respect how they learn best. Lucy's Discourse model may be one that assumed that people did not share their personal stories in public spaces. Perhaps Lucy just wanted to keep her personal life private.

It is important to note that not speaking in the classroom might have been Lucy's preferred way of learning. Just because she did not want to talk in whole class discussions, did not mean she was not learning. Christian and Bloome (2004) mentioned that a classroom culture is created by both teachers and students. This creation helps students "make sense of what is occurring in the classroom, what they are expected to do, what it means, how they are to go about the process of learning, and who they are in the classroom as learners, readers, and writers" (p. 366). Lucy acted as an agent when she resisted reading the essay aloud herself and submitting her essay to NPR, and resisted her classmates' questions about her personal life. This act of resistance suggested to Gina what she needed as a student in the class at that particular moment. Gina felt that the class would be missing out on her reading, but at the same time, it was important to pay

attention to the ways in which students use their agency to create a culture for their developmental needs.

As Holland et al. (1998) explained, the reshaping of identities, although it can be done in the space of a lifetime, takes time. Lucy's essay described the remarkable transformation and identity work that has allowed her to begin authoring herself within Gina's classroom. The essay provided an opportunity for Lucy to explain how she explored and reshaped her identities over the years. However, the public reading and following conversation was awkward and possibly could have hurt Lucy. Although Gina felt that opportunity would have helpful Lucy to explore her identity as a writer, instead it may have further alienated her from the classroom. Opportunities for identity exploration are not the same for all students. In addition, just because the opportunity is offered, it does not mean that students will take it up. Several different issues, such as ethnicity and language, shape how students engage in these opportunities.

What Can We Learn from the June, Freddy, and Lucy?

In each case, we are reminded that students' literacy practices are shaped by social, historical, and cultural factors. For June, her positional identities as a lesbian, African American, and struggling reader and writer, shaped how she interacted with others, thus shaping her literacy practices. Freddy's situational identities as a new student from McMurtry, as middle-class, and as a third generation Latino American shaped his interactions with classmates and his literacy practices. Finally, Lucy's identities as an immigrant from Mexico and English Language Learner shaped how she interacted with classmates and her literacy practices. It is important to be aware of the

relationship between literacy practices and identities because it illustrates the complexities of classroom interactions and the importance of attending to that relationship as a teacher.

One way that Gina attended to the relationship between identity and literacy was by providing moments of identity exploration in the classroom. These moments had different affects on the three cases. However, in each case, students reshaped, resisted, and maintained identities through these moments. June reshaped her identity as a reader, writer, researcher, and as a lesbian through the multigenre research project. In addition, she learned how to make the private public in order to promote change in her school. Freddy was able to describe how he resisted, maintained, and reshaped identities in order to become a part of a new figured world. Through moments of identity exploration, Freddy transformed the structure of a literacy event to fit his needs as a reader. For Lucy, moments of identity work enabled her to write a story of her transformation from a student in Mexico to a student in the United States. We clearly see Lucy's agency as she resisted and maintained identities to keep her personal life private in the public reading of her essay. Although each student experienced these opportunities for identity exploration in different ways, the three stories are about student agency and the ways in which these opportunities provided occasions for them to author themselves within the figured world of Gina's classroom. In the next chapter, I discuss the students' process of authoring and what it might mean for literacy educators and researchers.

Chapter Six

A Space of Authoring: Summary and Implications

SUMMARY

As I Grew Older
By Langston Hughes

It was a long time ago.
I have almost forgotten my dream.
But it was there then,
In front of me,
Bright like a sun--
My dream.
And then the wall rose,
Rose slowly,
Slowly,
Between me and my dream.
Rose until it touched the sky--
The wall.
Shadow.
I am black.
I lie down in the shadow.
No longer the light of my dream before me,
Above me.
Only the thick wall.
Only the shadow.
My hands!
My dark hands!
Break through the wall!
Find my dream!
Help me to shatter this darkness,
To smash this night,
To break this shadow
Into a thousand lights of sun,
Into a thousand whirling dreams
Of sun!

I begin this summary with a poem from Langston Hughes because he illustrates the complexity of identity and agency. The poem tells a story of the speaker

remembering a forgotten dream. This speaker refers to the color of his skin, implying that his race or ethnicity, represented as a wall, made it difficult for him to fulfill his dreams that were "bright like the sun." At the end of the poem, the speaker shatters the darkness into "a thousand whirling dreams," indicating the prospect of breaking down social, historical, and cultural boundaries in order to fulfill his dreams and open possibilities. Hughes' story is one of agency, empowerment, and belief. The poem resonates with this study because it illustrates how identities shape and are shaped by social, cultural, and historical worlds. In particular, themes of agency and empowerment relate to the goals that Gina had for her students in the classroom. As she stated in an interview, some of her students entered her classroom believing that their lives were already chosen for them. Gina wanted to show them that they had the power to shape their future. She realized that teachers made assumptions about students that positioned them as fixed, unchanging entities and that students took up these positions. Gina pushed against those assumptions by working to create and facilitate a figured world that promoted agency and empowerment through practices and talk that positioned students as capable literacy students. Identity work in the classroom became a space in which students could become agents in their worlds so that they shape the world around them.

I was honored to have the opportunity work in a classroom with a teacher who viewed agency and empowerment as important pieces of her classroom community. Identity work in a classroom requires risks because issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality often become part of that work. Gina and her students taught me that no matter the objectives of the classroom, the goals are complicated by social, historical, and

cultural issues that exist within any social setting. To respond to those unexpected complications, Gina consistently reflected on her teaching practices and transformed those practices based on the needs of her students. Although students typically appreciated opportunities for identity exploration and found value in those practices, students taught me that, based on their "history-in-person," they would resist, appropriate, or redefine those opportunities to fit their needs and intentions. However, no matter how students reacted, Gina worked with the imperfections of the classroom and continued to provide opportunities for students to examine their identities.

The central question of this study focused on how identity exploration occurred in a classroom with a White teacher and Latino/a and African American students. Drawing on Holland et al.'s (1998) concept of a "space of authoring," I noticed that moments of identity work opened spaces for students to "author" themselves and the world around them through literacy practices. Through analysis, I investigated how Gina created and/or facilitated such spaces for students. In addition, I considered how students' identity enactments shaped and were shaped by their literacy practices. I learned how these students orchestrated the practices of home and school in ways that resisted and appropriated practices and redefined those practices in new ways. The following summary reveals what I discovered about the creation of this space and the identity work of the three case studies.

A SPACE OF AUTHORING

Gina believed that it was important for her students to learn about themselves and the world around them through various literacy practices in her classroom. By providing

opportunities for students to explore their identities, Gina opened spaces for students in which they had opportunities to explore their identities and engage in the process of "authoring" themselves and the worlds around them (Holland et al., 1998; Luttrell and Parker, 2001). I discuss the creation of this space and the identity work of June, Freddy, and Lucy within moments of identity exploration through Holland et al.'s (1998) concept of the "space of authoring." Lachicotte (2002) explains that this space of authoring is

> formed, both within us and outside us, but the very multiplicity of persons who are identifiable positions in networks of social production, and of worlds of activity that are also scenes of consciousness. When we act, whether that act is instrumental or imaginative, we 'move' through this space figuratively. None of us is occupied singularly; we are not possessed by one identity, one discourse, one subject-position. Each act is simultaneously a social dynamic, social work, a set of identifications, and negations, an orchestration or arrangement of voices. And our sense of self comes from the history of our arrangements, our 'styles' of saying and doing through others. The freedom that Bakhtin calls authorship comes from the ways differing identifications can be juxtaposed, brought to work with and against one another, to create a position, our own voice, from which we respond to life's tasks (p. 61).

Similar to Bakhtin's vision of "self-fashioning," Holland et al. (1998) use the term "space of authoring" to make sense of the "continuing dialogic inner speech where active identities are ever forming" (p. 169). In the making of meaning, we "author" ourselves and the world around us; however, we are not a "freewheeling agent," but more like a "bricoleur, who builds with preexisting materials" (p. 170). In other words, we draw upon the words of others, defining authorship by the "interrelationship of differentiated vocal perspectives on the social world (p. 173).

Holland et al. (1998) explain that the authoring of the self occurs through relations of situated voices in which we enter into a dialogical relationship. Often our voices are in

conflict and we must sort through or orchestrate the voices in order to put them together in some way. Bakhtin (1981) says that we must create an internally persuasive discourse or a speech that is "married to one's own" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 182). We create that discourse through the struggle between external or centripetal forces and internal or centrifugal forces. A person develops an "authorial stance" when they begin to "rearrange, reword, rephrase, reorchestrate different voices" in which they strive to "liberate themselves from other's influences and expose limitations" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 182-183). Words "become our own" when we apply those words to new material and reveal new ways of meaning. For example, in a case study about authoring oneself as a woman in Nepal, Holland et al. (1998) explain that the women appropriated the identity afforded to them by the figured world, while at the same time they contested the expected life path (p. 232). Their process of authoring was an internal dialogic process in which they struggled with contradictory identities within their figured world.

Through this study, I found that students struggled to sort and/or orchestrate voices and practices of home and school in order to make meaning and author themselves and the world around them. I argue that opportunities for identity exploration opened spaces of authoring that provided occasions for students to mediate such authoring through literacy practices within the school world. However, each of the case study students authored her or himself in different ways. Some improvised and created new identities, while others, resisted and appropriated certain practices in order to share themselves publicly or remain private. Throughout this semester, I observed students struggle to orchestrate the polyphony of voices and practices surrounding them in order

to make meaning and use that meaning to serve personal intentions. Students were constantly in a process of authoring and took stances that continually formed fluid identities. Below, I describe the process of authorship for June, Freddy, and Lucy during moments of identity exploration.

One way that June, Freddy, and Lucy authored themselves or "wrote themselves" within Gina's classroom was as literacy students (Blackburn, 2002). Throughout the semester, June sorted through or orchestrated voices and practices from home and school in order to make sense out of her literacy identities. June dealt with contradictory identities in Gina's classroom – one that positioned her as a struggling literacy student and one that positioned her as a capable literacy student. When these spaces were not opened for June, she resisted literacy practices and found it difficult to transform the space into one that worked for her needs. This resistance is linked to her history as a "labeled" struggling reader and writer. June was not always confident about her capabilities and was not particularly motivated by grades. Moments of identity work during the multigenre research project provided a "space of authoring" which enabled June to orchestrate differing identities and voices about herself as a reader and writer in order to shape a space for her own activity. During this project, June took a new stance, and through her behavior, she authored herself as a literacy student who engaged in literacy practices if those practices were relevant and meaningful to her everyday life. Although Gina facilitated this space by creating an open assignment, June took advantage of it and shaped it so that she was able to mediate her literacy identities through reading, writing, and researching. Spaces for identity exploration enabled her to position herself in

a new way and push against centripetal or external forces, because she found those moments meaningful to her daily life. Thus, when June was able to explore identities, such as her sexuality, within a literacy event, June positioned herself as a capable reader, writer and researcher.

Freddy entered the classroom with a history as a confident and capable literacy student. His authorship as a literacy student was clearly linked to his authorship as a new student in the social world of Rushmore. One way that he negotiated those worlds was through a collective improvisation of a classroom reading. Freddy orchestrated voices and practices of his academic and social world in order to create a new way of reading that potentially benefited him as both a reader and comedian in the classroom. In other words, Freddy spontaneously used his cultural resources in order to bridge his social and academic world at that moment. It is important to note, that because Freddy entered the classroom as a confident literacy student, he was more likely to shape the classroom space to make it work for him. Unlike June, he did not need to wait for that space to be provided. Freddy's advantage can be linked to the history(ies) in person that he brought with him to the class.

Lucy took advantage of opportunities for identity exploration as a space to author herself as a successful literacy student in Gina's classroom. Lucy did this by both appropriating and resisting various classroom practices. She always completed assignments in the ways in which Gina expected, but Lucy resisted when she was asked to make a private story public and speak in front of the whole class. Through this resistance, Lucy authored herself as a student who did not want to speak in front of the

whole class and perhaps as a student who would prefer not to make her private life public. Like June, Lucy's resistance may be related to her lack of confidence about her literacy abilities upon entering Gina's classroom. Lucy entered with a history as a Spanish speaker, which shaped how she authored herself in the classroom. Lucy's *This I Believe* essay may have been a space for her to author herself as a confident writer, but her response to the public reading suggested that making her private life public was not comfortable for her. Lucy's resistant position reminds educators that resistance is not merely an act of defiance; there are valid reasons behind those resistances that are often connected with the social, cultural, and historical worlds that students bring with them when they enter the classroom.

These three students also authored themselves as members of worlds outside of Gina's classroom. For example, opportunities of identity exploration provided a space for June to author herself as a lesbian through the multigenre research project. June sorted through the words in articles, books, and encyclopedias in order to make sense out of the history of homosexuality. This practice was part of a process in which she resisted, redefined, and appropriated discourses about homosexuality. More specifically, she struggled to comprehend that discourse, challenged some of the arguments, and worked to make those words her own as she talked to me about what she read. Data analysis indicated that June became more comfortable identifying herself as a lesbian within this public space and later became involved in the Gay-Straight Alliance at Rushmore. Perhaps this space of authoring helped her to imagine how she might shape her school world in a way that benefited her identity as a lesbian.

It is also important to note that June authored herself as an African American in Gina's classroom through her interactions with others. She used African American Vernacular English as a cultural resource to become part of the social world of the classroom, which shaped her literacy practices, and oftentimes her engagement in signification with other classmates was a form of resistance to sanctioned literacy practices. Gina sometimes interrupted these ritual insults, especially if they related to issues of race, sexuality, gender, and class, because she was afraid that these playful insults might create a disrespectful space. When Gina expressed her concerns, students usually told her that they were just joking. Signifying is a kind of "mock" disrespect and these situations are places in which Gina's Whiteness shows. Gina worked to better understand these interactions and to find a balance in which students' discourses were valued and a space of respect was maintained in the classroom. June felt comfortable engaging in this social discourse in Gina's classroom which played a part in her process of authorship within the classroom.

Because Freddy recently transferred from another school, he struggled to author himself as a student at Rushmore High School. He sorted through the voices, expectations, and practices of his friends at McMurtry and his classmates at Rushmore in order to make meaning out of this new culture. He resisted giving up hobbies like hackysacking and changing his appearance in order to "fit in" at Rushmore. Instead, Freddy used language as a tool, specifically humorous language and behavior, to make his experience at Rushmore his own. Freddy's process of authoring came through in his *This I Believe* essay. The reader was able to see that Freddy was negotiating between his

social and academic worlds in order to pursue a career in the future. Thus, Freddy authored himself as one who made sacrifices for his future in order to fulfill his dreams.

Lucy authored herself as a Latina student who overcame the struggles of a recent immigrant from Mexico. Like the speaker in Hughes' poem, Lucy broke through a wall to fulfill her dreams as a successful student in a U.S. school. Through her *This I Believe* essay, Lucy orchestrated voices from home and school in order to redefine and transform her identities to become a part of the culture of Rushmore and Gina's classroom. Lucy's resistance to talk about her private life in the classroom may indicate how she worked to maintain her Latina identity in a U.S. school.

All of the students practiced agency during moments of identity exploration. Holland et al. (1998) argued that agency manifests itself in two ways. One is through improvisation and the other is through self-directed symbolization. Already discussed was Freddy's improvisation in the chorale reading. Self-directed agency is also important to examine because it provides insight into how students intentionally change their behavior in order to position themselves in new ways. Vygotsky (1978) believed that people are able to imagine themselves in worlds and manage their behavior so that they can become a part of those imagined worlds. Through these opportunities for identity exploration, June, Freddy, and Lucy engaged in self-directed agency.

June imagined herself in a figured world that accepted lesbians. She acted upon that imagined world by involving herself in the Gay-Straight Alliance. Her act to change her world was intentional, rather than spontaneous. Lucy imagined herself as a successful student in a U.S. school. Through her essay, we see how she managed her

behavior and constructed her identities so that she could become a part of the world. Freddy also managed his behavior in order to maintain his identities as a hackysacker by continuing his involvement in those hobbies, while at the same time using his humor to gain solidarity with his new classmates.

In a study about the gap between students' everyday literacies and school literacies, Luttrell and Parker (2001) argue that,

> Insofar as schools seek to provide students with the means to redefine themselves and to author worlds (a goal that most teachers in this project would strongly endorse) then it is important to close the gap between students' everyday literacy and their school-based literacy. Equally important, students and teachers must challenge the contexts of meaning (including hierarchy and privilege within schools) that shape how people use reading and writing to fashion their senses of self and identities. (p. 246)

Just as the teachers in Luttrell and Parker's (2001) study, Gina wanted students to redefine themselves and author their worlds. She facilitated a space for that authoring during moments of identity exploration. Although students played a part in constructing this space, it was carefully created and facilitated by Gina through instructional practices and talk that made connections to the lives of students, engaged students in multiple perspectives, investigated sociopolitical issues, and developed student agency. Through these practices and talk, Gina positioned students as valuable and capable. Like Gay's (2000) description of culturally responsive teaching, Gina used these practices and talk to shape a figured world that "acknowledged the legitimacy of cultural heritages", built "bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences," used "a wide variety of instructional strategies," and incorporated "multicultural information and resources" (p. 29). She did not shy away from talking about issues of race, class, gender, and

sexuality but instead created a space in which students could examine and explore how these issues played out in their local contexts. The students figured their world as one in which they could explore their identities, however they did not necessarily want to share those explorations with the rest of the class when it related to personal stories. This is an issue that merits further consideration: must identity exploration be made public in order for students to take an authorial stance? Students in Gina's classroom would argue no.

As Gina facilitated this space, I was reminded of the complexity of classrooms because of their social nature. Although she carefully tried to construct a classroom that empowered her students, that empowerment could not be guaranteed because students positioned themselves in various ways within that space. However, despite this messiness, Gina continued to negotiate with students and develop a space that fit their needs and interests. She realized that she could not create a "perfect" figured world for her students but worked with its inevitable imperfection, reshaping it to value the capabilities of her students. Students might not have always benefited from every opportunity, but the more opportunities that were provided, the more likely students would position themselves in new ways. It is within these moments that students might come to author themselves as confident, capable literacy students that potentially shape their worlds to fit their needs and intentions. Issues of power and status sometimes interrupted identity work in the classroom, which marginalized some students. Gina worked hard through her instructional practices, talk, and positionings to facilitate and control the space so that students were respectful of each other.

Gina cannot change the history(ies)-in-person that students bring with them to the classroom, but she can provide moments in which students discover themselves in new ways. Bakhtin (1981) argued,

> The self is a position from which meaning is made, a position that is "addressed" by and "answers" others and the "world" (the physical and cultural environment). In answering (which is the stuff of existence), the self "authors" the world – including itself and others (Holland et al., 1998, p. 173).

Like her students, Gina also must answer to her world. In other words, she must respond to the "social relations between" herself and her "addressee in speaking socially" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 188). Gina's behavior and talk was influenced by the social situation of the classroom and how she was positioned by others within that space. Thus, Gina had to manage complicated face-to-face interactions in ways that continued to create the space that she imagined for her classroom. Each year, students brought with them different stories, interests, and needs. Gina sorted through those needs and what she knew about teaching in order to create with her students the figured world of her classroom. Thus, she carefully considered how she would answer her world and continued her process of becoming a teacher through constant reflection. For Gina's classroom, moments of identity exploration became one way for students to find a "space of authoring." hooks (1994) argued that, "the classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility" (p. 207). Moments of identity exploration, although complicated, open up those possibilities.

This study suggests that opportunities for identity exploration are one way for teachers to transform possibilities in the classroom to benefit African American and

Latino/a students. In McCarthey's (2002) book about primary students' identities and literacy learning, she argued that teachers needed to provide more opportunities for identity exploration in the classroom. Although much research argues for the necessity of identity work (Fairbanks and Arial, 2006; Finders, 1997; McCarthey, 2002), not many studies have examined how teachers actually facilitate identity exploration in their classrooms and how these occasions might shape students identities. This study attempted to provide a glimpse into identity exploration in a classroom by analyzing specific instructional practices and talk that Gina used to facilitate that identity work.

Because this study took place with a White teacher and students of color, it attempted to tell the stories of marginalized students and illustrate how culture can be incorporated into the classroom (Gay, 2000; Greene and Abt-Perkins, 2003). Findings suggest that opportunities for identity exploration are one way for students to examine issues related to markers of difference and to bridge their academic and cultural resources.

Currently, theories of identity are burgeoning in the field of education. Several researchers have examined schools as figured worlds, but few have investigated how a classroom as a figured world is created and negotiated between a teacher and students (Blackburn, 2002; Luttrell and Parker, 2001; Pennington, 2004). This study proposes that although the construction of the classroom space is a collaborative process, the teacher played a key part in maintaining aspects of that world, especially when it came to negotiating issues of power and status. Through identity exploration, students had more opportunities to take up positions of power since Gina tried to shape a figured world that

valued students' backgrounds and discourses. In the following sections, I further explore implications for practice and future research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

> Dialogue with students about identity and the ways in which our identities are embedded within larger social contexts can help students see literacy as a set of practices that involve analysis, struggle, and ultimately, transformation. (McCarthey, 2002, p. 130)

Throughout this paper I investigated moments in which students explored their identities within literacy practices. I believe that it is important for students to be provided with a space in which they can struggle to make sense out of themselves and the world around them through reading, writing, discussion, and research. As Fecho (2004) found in his study about race, language, and culture in a classroom, students were able to construct identities by making meaning of literature together in a classroom. It is through these moments that students in this classroom taught me that they want and need to talk about sociopolitical issues, such as issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality. When Gina's students were able to choose topics, many of them examined issues that potentially defined or limited their experiences. Students need a space in which they can grapple with these issues. Critical literacy suggests that students can wrestle with these issues by interrogating texts, making differences visible, redefining literacy, and engaging in reflection and action (praxis) upon the world in order to transform it (Freire, 2001; Giroux, 1993; Lewison et al., 2002). In addition, hooks (1994) argues that dialogue can serve as a medium for students and teachers to cross boundaries and make sense out social, cultural, and historical issues. This study illustrated that students' were

able to position themselves in new ways during literacy events that made connections to students' everyday lives. June was able to position herself as a reader, writer, and researcher because the multigenre project was relevant to her life. Freddy was able to explore and examine a tension in he social world through an essay that he eventually read to a public audience. Lucy examined her identity as an immigrant, but expressed to the teacher that she rather keep her private life private. Thus, this study suggests that opportunities for identity exploration provided possibilities for students to imagine and perform identities as literacy students in new ways.

Students also wanted to connect their everyday lives with their schoolwork. This is a challenging instructional practice, because it requires that teachers take risks, learn about students' backgrounds, and modify lessons based on the needs and interests of students. Through choice and connection, students who have never been engaged, might engage themselves because school becomes relevant or a place to make sense out of themselves and their social and home worlds. Beach and Meyers (2001) found this to be true in inquiry-based projects about adolescents' identities in their social worlds which improved engagement in literacy classrooms because students "perceived some connection between English and their everyday lives" (p. 4). This study found that students became more engaged during moments of identity work, such as a reflective essay or whole-class reading.

Students also need to be able to explore their identities through literacy practices in both private and public spaces of the classroom. Gina provided those opportunities through various types of practices, such as writing, reading, researching, and discussion.

In order for students to be comfortable with identity work in a public space, classrooms need to be a place in which students feel comfortable talking about their opinions and sociopolitical issues. Pratt (1991) described a classroom as a "contact zone" in which "cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (p. 126). Although ideal, students did not always feel comfortable talking about issues that were directly related to personal issues and experiences. As Ellsworth (1989) said, no matter how hard teachers try to create a safe space, issues of power still exist. Educators can talk about these issues of power, but that does not mean they will go away. hooks (1994) also recognized that there are possibilities for "confrontation, forceful expression of ideas, or even conflict" when students talk about subjects in which they are passionate (p. 39). Like hooks and Pratt, I advocate for a democratic setting in which students' voices are recognized and avenues for identity exploration are diverse. Students should have the opportunity to engage in identity work through various literacy practices, such as journal writing, literature, and discussion. In Gina's classroom, she provided multiple opportunities for students to explore their identities, through multigenre research, the *This I Believe* essay, writing notebooks, and classroom readings. These various avenues of exploration opened more doors for students who preferred to explore their identities privately and/or publicly. Gina also worked to create a safe space by positioning students' stories as valuable and by sharing her own stories with her students.

Although students need to be able to relate to the literacies of the classroom, that does not mean that they do not need to explore the views of multiple perspectives.

Finders (1997) suggested a "student-negotiated" pedagogy that makes visible "political tensions that accompany literate choices" (p.126). Davies (1993) called this type of practice, "making the familiar strange," in which students challenge assumptions and question their own perspectives. Discussion about literature and examinations of characters' dilemmas are one way for students to explore social, cultural, and historical issues outside of the personal.

It is also necessary that students have the opportunity to explore their identities as literacy students. Although Gina's class engaged in a few conversations, it would benefit students to continually explore their own literacy autobiographies. Understanding the histories they bring to the classrooms and how those histories shape their literacy practices could possibly open spaces for students to redefine what it meant to be a reader, writer, and/or researcher.

Findings of this study also remind educators of the relationship between identity and literacy. Although that relationship complicates teaching practices, it provides insight into students' literacy practices and how teachers might change their pedagogy to reach the needs of students. Spaces of identity exploration in a classroom will always remain complicated because literacy practices and social interests cannot be separated. As a White teacher of Latino/a and African American students, Gina wanted to provide opportunities for students to bridge their home and school lives. She was interested in their backgrounds, but at the same time understood that she would never comprehend their experiences. Regardless of Gina's goals, she continued to struggle to understand some of the interactions and behaviors of her students. For example, Gina constantly

reflected on ways to negotiate June's signifying with classmates or Lucy's silence. She negotiated these interactions with inconsistent results that led her to continually examine this issue throughout the semester.

Gina was also aware that issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality shaped her teaching practices. It is important that teachers, especially those teaching students with different backgrounds than her own, be reflective about their teaching and how markers of difference impact teaching in order to broaden their understanding of students' identities and literacy practices. Gay (2000) and Ladson-Billings (1995) argue for culturally responsive pedagogy. According to Gay (2000), this pedagogy validates and affirms cultural knowledge of students by building bridges between home and school experiences. In addition, culturally relevant pedagogy empowers, liberates, and transforms students by enabling them to be more successful learners. Findings of this study suggest that as classrooms become more diverse, it is beneficial for teachers to reflect on their own backgrounds, listen to the needs and backgrounds of students, and shape their pedagogy based on those needs and backgrounds. Teacher's must constantly reflect on, learn about, and redefine their philosophy of teaching.

It is important for teachers to realize the sociocultural nature of classrooms and learning. Although educators have been saying this in recent years, what does it really mean for teachers? In this study, it meant that even though you provide opportunities for identity exploration; open spaces for choice and connection; get to know your students; and/or build their agency, social, historical, and cultural issues are always going to complicate how these opportunities occur. Each year, a new group of students bring with

them "history-in-persons" that shapes their literacy practices. Bound up in making the history in person are

> all of the multiply authored and positioned selves, identities, cultural forms, and local and far-reaching struggles, given together in practice… Persons as agents are always forming themselves in collective terms as they respond to the social situations they encounter locally and in their imaginations. Social forms and cultural resources produced in these situations are made personal in the arrangement or orchestration of the voices enmeshed in them. (Holland and Lave, p. 13).

Thus, it is important that teachers, despite this messiness, continue to negotiate with their students to build a space that benefits the various needs of students. Gina did this through her instructional practices and talk that positioned students as capable and valuable. It is important for teachers to sustain dialogue with each other and continue to learn about new teaching practices through activities, such as book groups or classroom research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

> In *Tar Baby*, the classic concept of the individual with a solid, coherent identity is eschewed for a model of identity which sees the individual as a kaleidoscope of heterogeneous impulses and desires, constructed from multiple forms of interaction with the world as a play of difference that cannot be completely comprehended. (Toni Morrison, 1993)

Morrison uses the metaphor of a kaleidoscope to describe the complexities of identities that can never "be completely comprehended" and illustrate how they interact "with the world." I appreciate her metaphor because it illustrates the complexity of identities and how they are fluid and constantly being constructed. One limitation of this study is that it examined only one classroom with a White teacher and African American and Latino/as students. More research needs to be done that involves the relationship

between adolescents' identities and literacy within the contexts of various classrooms. Every classroom has a different impact on the how students create, construct, and share identities. McCarthey and Moje (2002) argue that "all learning--and literacy learning, in particular--can be conceived of as moments in identity construction and representation" (p. 233). In this study, students' identities shaped and were shaped by their literacy practices by redefining the structure of literacy events and positioning themselves in new ways through identity work. Recently, research has supported theory that this relationship exists and is important to pay attention to, but more research needs to examine strategies that teachers use to negotiate these identities in their classrooms. How can we help teachers realize that students are not fixed identities and that they are capable of positioning themselves in new ways? How can we do the same for students? In this research, Gina learned about the identities of her students through written assignments, classroom discussions, and individual conversations, which helped her to develop a more fluid view of her students. Gina also read literature about teaching African American and Latino/a students and discussed these issues with other teachers in a teacher research group.

In addition, further investigation about identity exploration within a classroom needs to be done within various contexts. How do teachers across a variety of school contexts facilitate identity exploration? What range and types of opportunities for moments of identity exploration shape students' literacy practices? By what methods can educators build classroom spaces that enable students to explore their identities? Through a study about literature discussions, Lewis (1997) found that issues of power

and status often played a part in the ways in which students engaged in discussions. In her book, she suggests that students should be given open spaces in which they are able to

> negotiate social positions without teacher surveillance, times when their activities are liminal in a sense that they are truly 'betwixt and between' partially coopting the role of the teacher, partially embracing the role of the student, friend, or rebel. (Lewis, 2001, p. 176)

In other words, it is important to provide various spaces for students to engage in literacy practices so that interruptions of power can occur. Although a classroom can never truly be a "safe space," differing practices can provide moments with different power structures. More research needs to focus on how teachers and students negotiate issues of power and status. What can teachers do to provide more opportunities for what Lewis calls "interruptions"? This study suggests that identity exploration done in both private and public spaces was one way that interruptions of power occurred in the classroom.

Because schools are becoming increasingly diverse, but future teachers continue to remain White, middle class, and female, research needs to continue to examine what Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2000) discuss as culturally relevant pedagogy. This includes research on how teachers build relationships with students of various backgrounds. Rex (2006) conducted a study about various teachers' negotiations of African American Vernacular English in their classrooms. She found that each case raised more questions about culturally relevant pedagogy, including what White teachers can do to better understand African American students in order to transform pedagogy to fit the needs of their students. To this, I would broaden the question to include students

from various backgrounds and cultures. I agree with Rex (2006) that we need to do more research on how the use of culturally relevant teaching can succeed in sustaining literacy learning. This study attempted to illustrate how one White teacher negotiated various discourses in her classroom. More research needs to explore how educators can better prepare preservice teachers for the social, cultural, and political issues that shape classrooms. Explicitly dealing with these issues in the classroom means that teachers and students must take risks. In addition, teachers must be able to reflect on their own perspectives and issues of power and status that will occur in their classrooms.

More ethnographic case study research paired with discourse analysis would offer more insight into issues of identity and literacy. Ethnographic methodology paired with discourse analysis provides thick description and context to the detailed analysis of talk (Rogers, 2004). Ethnographic research often illustrates the complexities of a situation and the multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). Because conversation is essential to learning, discourse analysis of talk in classrooms provides insight into the ways in which language is constrained by social, historical, and cultural factors. In addition, a critical look into discourse of a classroom provides insight into the development of identity and literacy (Florio-Ruane and Morrell, 2004).

Finally, more research needs to be done in classrooms with teachers who struggle to negotiate the relationship between identity and literacy. Often research criticizes teacher practices and/or simplifies the practice of teaching by offering easy solutions. In this dissertation, I did not want to oversimplify Gina's instructional practices and talk or

students' enactments and constructions of identities. Teaching is complicated and I felt that it was beneficial to portray how teachers and students work within that complicated world. It is imperative that research portrays the "kaleidoscope" of identities that play into teaching and learning in a literacy classroom. Otherwise, teachers may enter the classroom with a simplified view of pedagogy and a narrow perspective of their students that could potentially be detrimental to their education.

Appendix A

Example Field Notes

Field Notes	Personal Notes	Theoretical Notes	Methodological Notes
Gina stands at front of the classroom. Students are instructed to grab a blank sheet of paper. These instructions are on the overhead when they come in so they know what to do. Gina talks about relating the prompt to personal experience, like sports, dancing, or love. She explains that students must learn to tweak the prompt. They will play prompt roulette. She repeats several times that they are only writing an outline – not the entire essay. Students watch Gina while at the same time getting organized etc. Detrek and Freddy laugh and react to prompt roulette	She was frustrated because a student wrote the entire essay in one class	What is figured world of classroom? How do these ids work in the classroom – how positioned? Humor with Detrek and Freddy When Gina talks about writing, she makes it personal and individual. Might have something to do with identity. It becomes an exercise of identity	It would be interesting to collect some of the outlines to see if students examine/explore identities

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Questions

Interview one

- How/why did you become a teacher?
- Describe your school and classroom.
- What is most inspiring about teaching in your classroom? What is most challenging about teaching in your classroom?
- What goals do you have for your students? For yourself as a teacher? How have they changed over the past year?
- How do you connect/build relationships with your students? How do you help students build relationships between students?
- How do you feel as a White, female, middle-class teacher in your classroom?
- How are students doing on TAKS test? Is there a big emphasis on the test in your classroom? How do you integrate your philosophy with standardized tests?
- What kind of talk do you think is important in the classroom? Why? How do you promote these discussions?
- How do you get students to participate in the classroom?
- What kinds of things do students choose to talk about in class? How do you handle it if it is controversial?
- Have you ever talked explicitly about how to talk in the classroom? Do you feel like there are particular students who are unable to understand these norms? Why?

Appendix C

Student Focus Group Interview Questions

- Describe your school.
- Do you have opportunities to talk in class? If so, about what? Do you like these opportunities? What do you learn from them?
- Do you feel like you are able to express your opinion in class? Is that important to you? What kinds of things would you like to talk about in class? What makes you not talk about them?
- Do you ever feel like you can't or shouldn't talk in class? Why or why not?
- Is there a difference in the way you talk at home with friends than at school?
- What lessons have you found meaningful in this classroom? Why? What do you talk and read about in this classroom?
- I am going to show you a video clip of a discussion from this classroom. Are these students joking with each other? Do you think they are being disrespectful of each other? Why or why not?

Appendix D

Independent Reading Selections

Book and author	Summary
Always Running by Luis J. Rodriguez	A memoir of an East Los Angeles gang member who documented his youth in an effort to deter his son from continuing his involvement in a gang that he recently joined.
The Color of Water by James Mcbride	The son of a black minister and a mother who would not admit she was White, Mcbride retraces his mother's footsteps and recreates her story. Mcbride shares recollections of his experience as biracial and a child of poverty, along with his flirtations with drugs, violence and eventual self-realization and success.
The Great Gatsby by F.Scott Fitzgerald	A portraits of American society during the roaring twenties about a self-made millionaire who finds out that wealth cannot afford him the privileges enjoyed by the upper-class.
Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck	Set in the Depression, this novel depicts the lives of migrant workers. Focusing on two characters who arrive in the Salinas Valley during peak season, Steinbeck creates scenes between Lenny, a big, severely limited worker who does not know own strength, and George, a whippet-thin man who serves as Lenny's constant companion and protector.
Catcher in the Rye J.D. Salinger	An adolescent narrator, Holden, was recently expelled from prep school for failing most of his classes. The teenager, who has already left four private schools, recounts his last holiday.
Bless Me Ultima by Rudolfo Anaya	A coming of age novel about an adolescent Chicano living in New

	Mexico during the 1940s. Antonio is torn between his father's side of the family who ride on the llano and his mother's village and farming relations.
Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe	Set in the 1890s during the coming of White men in Nigeria. The novel is a story about the tragedy of Okonokwo who has worked all of his life to overcome his father's weakness and has arrived, finally, at great prosperity and even greater reputation among his fellows in the village of Umuofia.

Appendix E

Positionality Chart

Transcript	Notes on positionality
June: That is b.s. Give me that before I slap you (walks to another group).	Self as angry and frustrated Self as signifying on Stacey Others as making her angry or frustrated
Gina: You don't speak like that in this class.	Self as teacher, one who manages behavior June as disrespectful
Stacey: Miss, I don't think she mean nothing. I think she is feeling discouraged now.	Self as sticking up for June June as discouraged
June: Yes, I am feeling discouraged. Give me that paper, woman.	Self as discouraged Others as making her angry/frustrated Self as signifying on Stacey
Stacey: Are you feeling discouraged girl?	Self as the questioner, one who knows she is frustrated, authority Self as signifying on June June as discouraged
June: Yes.	Self as frustrated
Stacey: Girl/boy. Are you feeling discouraged?	Self as questioner/authority Self as signifyin on June June as girl/boy (connotation to homosexuality) June as discouraged
Shane: I feel insulted for my friend. Don't talk like that.	Self as a friend, sticking up for friend June as a friend, one who needs someone to stick up for her
Stacey: What do you want, you boy/girl?	Self as questioner/authority Self as signifying on Shane Shane as boy/girl, someone who wants something from her

June: Big iron giant.	Stacey as a big iron giant Self as sticking up for herself Self as signifying on Stacey
Shane: Thank you.	Self as satisfied that issue is resolved June as one who resolve the issue

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Vita

Amy Maurine Vetter was born in Bossier, Louisiana, on October 27, 1976, to her loving parents, Eddie Vetter and Kay Colyer. After completing her elementary and secondary education in Shreveport, Louisiana, she attended Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas. She received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English in 1998. During the following four and one half years she was employed as a teacher at McNeil High School in Austin, Texas. In 2001, she entered The University of Texas at Austin where she received her Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction. Upon completion of the Master's in 2003, she transitioned into a full-time doctoral program in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis on Language and Literacy Studies and a portfolio in Women and Gender Studies. As a doctoral student she worked as a teaching assistant and assistant instructor at The University of Texas at Austin, and as an adjunct professor at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas.

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